"YOURS TRULY - - - JACK THE RIPPER" by ROBERT BLOCH

JULY

Weird Tales

15¢

THE STREET OF FACES

by

Frank Owen

After the war its ghosts return to a mid-Pacific reef

"His Last Appearance"
by H. BEDFORD-JONES

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Weird Tales

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

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by

Robert Bloch

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THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

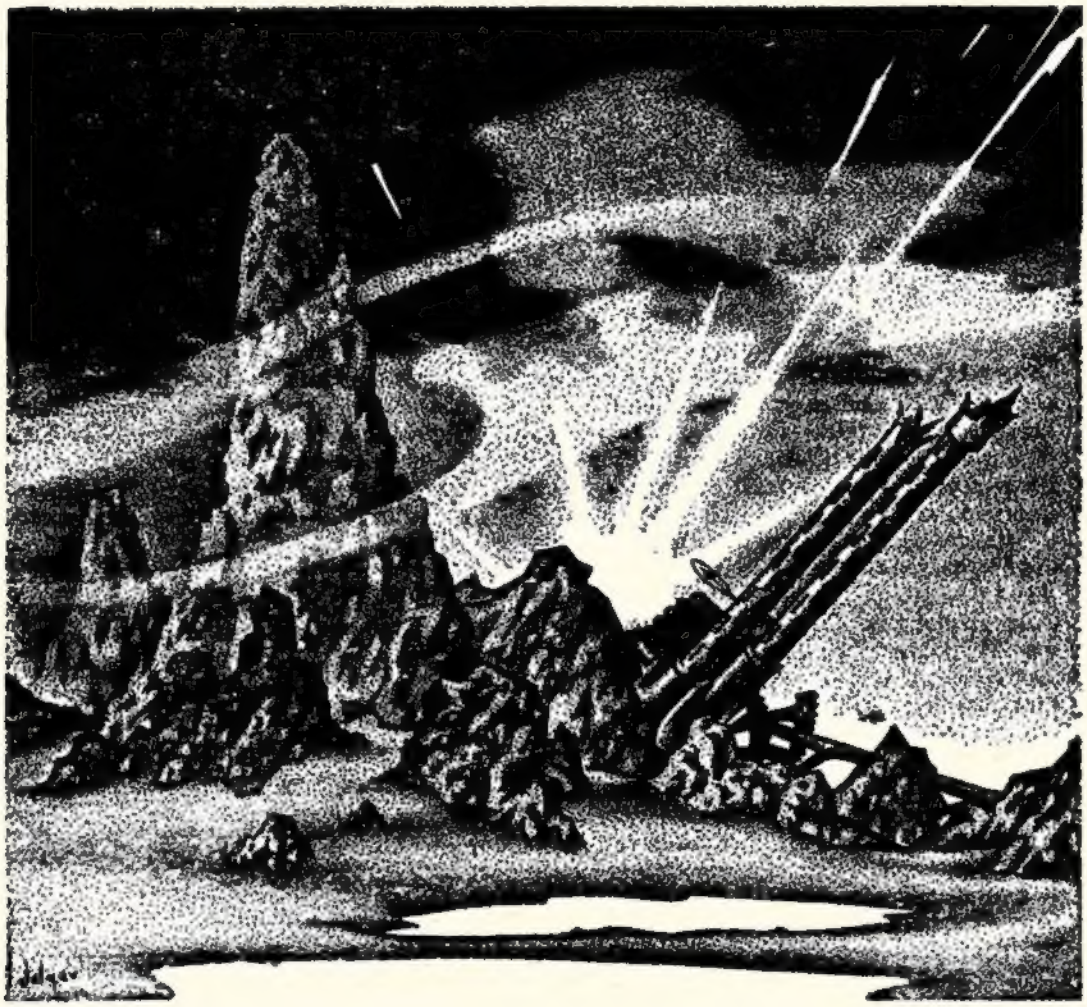
His Last Appearance

What makes this country you revere?
Not trees and earth and citied roar
And ways of life—but something more:
Voices that rise from far and near,
Voices of those who went before
And gave their lives by field and shore.

What makes this fatherland you love?
Not prating words nor gestures grand,
But you yourself. Your soul's command,
Stern self-denial (faith above
All else), your strength of heart and hand—
These go to make your fatherland.

GORDON sat looking out across the reefs and the blue sparkling Pacific, from which the last vestiges of war had vanished half a year ago.

The great Brisbane Clipper, instead of



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

pausing here in mid-Pacific to refuel, was moored to the floats; a hurricane somewhere over the horizon ahead had halted her. The passengers were occupying the little rest-house. There was nothing on this bare coral islet except the hangars and sheds, the workers' quarters and shops, the rest-house and the radio and weather station, and a few isolated graves left over from war days.

Gordon was a tough citizen, hard as rock and with as much sentiment in him as a block of granite might have. During the war he had worked up to top place in the shipyards. After the sudden Nazi collapse he had piled up money, shrewdly, and got into politics. It was Gordon, they say, who was partly responsible for winning the Japanese war; it was he who hammered away until the policy of cutting off

Certain reefs in mid-Pacific rightfully belong to those who stood guard there against the enemy—even after death.

the octopus tentacles was abandoned and the bombing fleets wiped the Jap cities off the earth's face. He got no credit for it; he had few friends and was well hated in many quarters. He had the heart of a crocodile, and the sympathetic appeal of an iceberg, by all accounts.

Now he was on a sight-seeing tour of the world, the great new world slowly emerging from its war-agonies. His flinty features, his bitter hard eyes, showed no kindliness for anything or anyone. Back in the shipyards they used to call him "Rock" Gordon; usually they added another word to it.

Such was the man who sat on the wide veranda of the rest-house and chewed at an unlighted cigar and sipped a long cool drink.

One of the Clipper pilots came out of the doorway and paused beside Gordon, who indicated two white objects at a projecting point of the island.

"What are those white things?"

"Grave markers," said the Clipper man. "Two Flying Fortress chaps are buried there, Cox and Magruder. They landed here during the war; quite a story to it. The Nips wiped 'em out, finally. At low tide, on the left of the channel, you can see what's left of a Jap destroyer they perforated."

"Why weren't they taken home for burial?" snapped Gordon.

"Seems like they wanted to stay here; nothing but coral rock to bury 'em in, but they liked it. When we retook the island, later, we found a notebook they had written in, asking to be buried here if they were killed. Apparently they had worked up an affection for the place, God knows why! They're the ones who named it Coral Territory."

"Affection for this blistering hole!" sniffed Gordon. "Isn't likely."

"You never know. The mechanics here tell some darned funny stories; they claim that Cap'n Magruder sticks around here. Even in full daylight. Some swear they've seen him."

"Rot!" said Gordon scornfully. "Show me a photo of a ghost and I'll believe it, maybe."

The pilot laughed. "Well, you give a chap three months on this coral reef, and he goes nuts; he can see anything. One of the men even claimed he had talked with Magruder's ghost. And you'd be surprised how many folks take it seriously. Some cockeyed geezer back home wrote it up in a magazine, claiming that a reef like this in the middle of the ocean was an ideal place for occult manifestations, as he called it. Something about vibrations or frequencies; I don't savvy it, myself."

Gordon merely grunted disdainfully, and the pilot went his way, thankful to escape silly questions about how soon the Clipper would get off.

SOME time passed. Gordon was not in the least sleepy; his tremendous energy needed little sleep. And he seldom drank; this gin-and-bitters was his only drink today. His head was perfectly clear. In fact, he was thinking about a big business deal he could put through by radiogram. He glanced at his watch, computing the difference in time between here and San Francisco. He was on Pacific time here; it was precisely three o'clock. He remembered to wind his wrist-watch. As he was doing it, an officer came up the steps and nodded to him. His was a strange face to Gordon; probably, he thought, one of the men stationed here.

"Like to look around the place?" asked the stranger.

"Too hot," grunted Gordon. The other laughed. He was a boyish-looking young chap, and oddly enough wore an army uniform, flier's wings and the insigna of a captain.

"It was a lot hotter when we came. Just

a year ago today, three o'clock. How'd you like to turn the time back? It might be done, with a man like you. When a chap has a lot of vitality, things like that can happen."

"I don't get you," growled Gordon. The other lit a cigarette, smilingly.

"No, I expect you don't. But you will. This island is a wonderful place, really! It's a part of the United States now, you know; the Congress enacted it, just after the war, on account of the things that happened here. Sort of a public monument, like the National Parks at home."

Gordon was not interested, and merely grunted. The other rattled on lightly.

"Grand ship, that Clipper yonder! Y' know, we came here in a Fortress; one of the old B type, without guns in the belly and tail. She was good, though. That was just after Pearl Harbor. We were making for Manila, and ran slap into a hell of a Jap flotilla and their planes came up at us. My ship got it hot and heavy, we lost contact, and that's how we happened to come down here—"

This was the last Gordon remembered, later. He seemed to merge somehow with the man talking to him; everything seemed to merge. The Clipper vanished. The boats and the rest-house itself disappeared. Nothing was left except a few sheds, and a big plane that sat on the coral sand near the sheds. It was a Nakashima, an old type of Jap naval plane, and a group of Japs were working around it.

The Fortress had no choice; she came down in a long, straight dive, with blood leaking out of her. Ack-ack fire had played the devil with her. Magruder had the controls, his boyish features white and set and strained. He was unhurt, but his co-pilot was dead. The radio man and his radio were blown all to hell. None of the crew was alive except Cox, the bombardier, and the burly sergeant-mechanic, Griswold.

Magruder would have preferred that any of the others might have traded places with Cox. Neither he nor Cox had much use for each other. However, all that was in the past. Magruder looked at his gauges; the gas tanks damned near empty. The line must have been cut somewhere. Well, he had plenty to do his work here and get down.

THE Fortress shivered. A white burst showed close by; others blossomed behind. The Japs down below had seen her. An ack-ack gun was whipping away down below. Men were frantically getting into the Nakashima and trying to get her up. Magruder laughed at that. Small chance! That Nip fighter was his meat now.

The two remaining engines roared full; two had been shot dead. The Fortress swooped and circled, and her guns jetted flame. A crazy hysteria had taken hold of Magruder. When the Nakashima burst into flame, he went after the gun crew and they were wiped out. Then he got after the running, screaming, panicked Japs who were breaking for cover. More bursts swept them. Magruder ran them down like grounded pigeons. He ducked and swooped and banked all over the coral reef and back again, killing Japs. He had already heard what these Nips had done to the Clipper people when they took over this coral islet.

Then a wild hope seized him. There must be fuel here—he might be able to get away with the patched-up Fortress! That is, if he could land her. There was something wrong. That shell-burst had smashed something—his controls would not respond—

She crashed, and did a beautiful job of it, but not till Magruder had cut the switch. The crash knocked him silly; the whole front end was a twisted wreck.

Cox and Griswold got him out the hatch. He came out of it in no time and was quite all right. The three sat down on the hot

coral, got rid of needless equipment, and lit up cigarettes.

"Well, we're here," said Magruder, looking around. The Nakashima was burning and sending up a pillar of smoke. Not a living thing was in sight.

"Any orders, sir?" asked Griswold. Magruder shook his head. "Then I'll take a look around. Might be able to clap a bandage on some of these Japs."

"After a fifty-caliber bullet hits, they don't need a bandage," said Cox. Griswold grinned, slapped his holstered pistol, and sauntered away. Magruder sat with his head swimming, until Cox brought him out of it with a quiet remark.

"Nice landing we made, Cap'n. Looks like it washed up Betsy for keeps."

Betsy was the Fortress.

"Lucky to make any landing at all," said Magruder. "And you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head."

"Oh!" chirped Cox. He was a little fellow, full of ginger. "And I s'pose you'd like to be saluted every hour, and have me promote your meals and your coffee and keep your boots shined? Like hell I will! You're nothing but a pilot now, and a lousy one."

MAGRUDER came from Portland, and Cox from Seattle, and neither of them forgot it.

"You've needed a poke in your sour puss for a long time, and now you get it," said Magruder, standing up. "And—"

He was cut short by the sharp, heavy report of a shot, then another, then several all at once. Both men swung around. Sergeant Griswold, halfway up the island, had run into three Nips hiding in a crevice of the coral, and they were not dead. Magruder broke into a run, but Cox outran him, lugging out his service pistol.

By the time Magruder got there the last Nip was dead, but so was Griswold. They had plugged him as he came up. Magruder looked down at Griswold, his face working, then up at Cox.

"Damn it!" he said. "Look, Coxy, let's forget everything."

Cox put out his hand, and they shook. Cox and Griswold had been great pals.

"You know," said Cox, "we got a lot of work to do. Burying."

"Yeah," said Magruder. "Let's make sure of these Nips, first."

They fell to work searching, but those .50 machine-gun bullets had played no favorites. Their only job was to get rid of the bodies, which were simply slid into the water on the ebb tide. It was different with Sergeant Griswold and the rest of the crew of the Fortress; they were boxed and laid in the sand above high tide. This job took the two of them through the night and most of the next day.

There was no lack of material for boxes. All the stores and materials of the Clipper people were here and the Nips had landed a lot besides; it looked, thought Magruder, as though the base were to be permanently held, which meant that more Japs would be along. Not a pleasant reflection.

This fear quite spoiled what would have otherwise been an adventure worth while.

The radio station had been wrecked by shellfire when the Japs took over the islet; repairs were under way, but there was no hope of using the outfit. The Fortress radio was nothing but ragged fragments, like Betsy herself. They salvaged two of their machine-guns but were low on ammunition.

Water and food supplies were ample. The shops and other buildings had also been shelled to bits, though rebuilding had begun. Stock piles of gasoline and fuel oil, all made in the U.S.A., were under the sheds.

"Y'know, we could stay here a long while and just take sun-baths," said Cox on the second evening, relaxing after that hard day's work.

"That is, if nobody else came along."

"You said it, Cap'n. When do you look for 'em?"

"Tomorrow or next week or next month," said Magruder lazily. "Our first job is to get organized for defense. We're out of the air but still at home."

"What d'ye mean, home?"

"Well, this is part of our country, isn't it? The guys that were here when the Nips came, put up a hell of a fight; they're dead or eating rice and fish-heads now. I'd sooner be dead than on that starvation diet. Yes, this island is U. S. soil, sure enough."

"Not the kind of soil we got around Seattle," said Cox, eyeing the snowy coral sand. "Maybe it reminds you of Portland; they got a lot of sand up that way."

"No, argument, Coxy," returned Magruder, refusing the challenge. "We got to stick together, bud. The Sarge checked out here; but before him—think of those guys the Nips caught! No graves around; they must have been fed to the fish, too. Well, that helps all the more to make this U.S. ground."

"Oh, I get the idea now," said Cox. "Does make it easier to think of it that way, sure! We get to beefing about back home—well, this is part of home, sure! The old U.S. has reached out a hell of a ways to get here, though. Y' know, I'd like to see one of them whistling Navy planes coming down the sky."

"What you'll see is something else sooner, I reckon."

"And when we run out of cigarettes?"

"Use what we took off those Nips. Maybe we'll find some in the stores, too."

NOW began sunny, endless days of preparation against the worst. For two men to even dream of beating off any Jap force that might come, was fantastic; and yet some fantastic things had been done in this war.

Magruder had two things in mind; first defense, and second emplacement. They had two heavy machine-guns off Betsy but mighty little ammunition; a number of Tommy-guns with boxes of cartridges, and a beautiful Jap machine-gun of lighter caliber, of the type invented by a White Russian refugee, that will not overheat. There was a battery of ack-ack emplaced, but only half a dozen shells left for same; practically useless.

In a newly-built emplacement, however, was installed a three-inch quick-firing gun, with case after case of ammunition to hand. The Japs had obviously been aiming to install an entire battery of these guns here, but only one had arrived. The situation for it was superb, commanding the reefs and the one channel of approach, and indeed the entire islet.

Magruder consulted with the bombardier.

"We only got one gun crew, and that's me," said Cox, grinning cheerfully. "So you praise the Lord and I'll pass the ammunition. I reckon I can serve that three-inch baby, though those shells aren't peanuts by any means. Better keep that Jap machine-gun for close quarters. You figure on planes strafing us?"

"Figure on everything," Magruder said. "If we hold off till a plane's right on top of us, we might get her with the ack-ack; otherwise not. What scares me is the idea of a landing party."

"It ain't nice to think of, for a fact; not half as nice as the Seattle waterfront," observed Cox. "But if it happens, I reckon we'll raise some hell before we go under. Look what I found in Griswold's stuff!"

He unfolded a Stars and Stripes of silk, which ran to some size.

"Don't hoist it now," said Magruder. "If the Nips do show up, we want to do our first advertising with bullets."

They decided to plant the two heavy machine-guns close to the water, after careful plotting out where any landing party

might be expected to come ashore. Well back of these they got to work building a barricade of coral chunks, deciding to place the Jap gun here; this was a labor of some days.

The monotony here was frightful—monotony of sea and sky, of coral sand, of food, of each other. A week of it had Magruder's nerves ragged and Cox yapping at him like a terrier. They came to blows, but in the midst of a battle royal sober sense came back to them both at the same moment; they sheepishly abandoned the scrap and went for a swim, and this was a lesson. They drew more together after this, appreciated each other more.

"What you said about this being a part of home," observed Cox one evening, "kind of grows more true all the time. U.S. soil, I mean. It feels that way, somehow. My folks live in Seattle, and I had a job at Olympia till I went into the army. This is nothing like that country, and yet I got the feeling that this is part of home, too."

"So it is," assented Magruder. "That's because men died here to hold it, our men. Just a naked little coral reef, of course, but it was part of the great Clipper adventure. It wasn't worth anything till we took it in, but now its worth a hell of a lot, same as Midway and Guam and the rest. I'm glad you've got that U.S. flag to run up. We won't have an earthly chance if the Japs do come, you know."

"Shucks! No bullet's got my name on it," declared Cox scornfully.

"How do you know?"

"Fortune-teller told me so. I've got a real long life-line."

Magruder made no comment. It was a good feeling to have; he wished he could feel the same.

"Fine and healthy for us here, anyhow, even if the grub's monotonous," he said cheerfully. "Only one thing I do wish—that's for some earth, real earth. This blasted coral rock and sand isn't real. Gets on my nerves sometimes."

"That's right," said Cox. "Earth with worms in it, huh? Say, you know—if this is part of our country, what state does it belong to?"

Here an argument started and it went far. They finally decided that the island was a territory all to itself, like Hawaii or Alaska; that stood to reason, said Cox.

With morning they began a game that sounded silly yet was serious. They named the island, whose name was unknown to them; they called it Coral Territory. They went over it yard by yard and named the reefs and bays, then went on to divide it up into various portions — a statehouse here, a courthouse there.

THIS game lasted for two days, until Cox broke down and put his face in his arms and bawled. Magruder comforted him; it was sheer loneliness, empty sea and sky that got on the nerves. They ended up by laughing in unison.

They had neglected to keep track of time, but figured it was a trifle over two weeks from the day they came down, when one morning Magruder was up and yelling, and Cox joined him, and they hurriedly made a bonfire of scrap they had collected. A plane, a whistling Navy plane sure enough, as the queer radio-like whistle of her struts sounded. But she was high and far, a mere silvery fleck in the sunrise; she passed and was gone, and in silence they beat out the smoke signal.

Yet, where one was, might come others; this hope gave them a lift.

"That soil you talked about one night, with earth worms," Cox said abruptly upon a day, as they dried off in the hot sun after swimming. "I been thinking about it. I'd like to see some of it, too. Earth, with moss on it, and maybe a sapling starting up green. You know there's not one blessed green thing here?"

"That's a fact," said Magruder, nodding. "If there was any earth, there'd be green things sprouting, you bet! You take that little headland of coral, up there just past Radio City—that'd be a swell place to plant Griswold, if there was just some real dirt soil to do it in! You'd see trees there in no time."

"If there was water, which there ain't," said Cox, dreamily. "I'm getting sort of tired of this here canned water."

"Well, it's good water anyhow."

"Yeah, but I bet them drums had oil or gas in 'em once, by the taste. Hello, tide's out! Let's go get us a fresh pan fry."

Low tide brought riches, as always, for the reef pools often held all sorts of fish, but today Magruder cut his foot on the coral, a bad cut. Cox got out Betsy's first-aid kit and Magruder was almost glad of the injury, since it made a welcome break in the overwhelming monotony of life. But he had to hobble.

Among the meager effects of the Japanese who had been here, they discovered a tiny portable phonograph. At first they disdained it; later on the thing became a life-saver. The only records were, of course, in Japanese, but two of them were music. Cox got the idea of inventing a dance to go with this alleged music, and they cavorted about by the hour in rather crazy attitudes and steps. It was exercise, and it did help to break the time, but Magruder found that accursed music imprinted on his brain and so finally called a halt.

They summoned up every aid of imagination and invention to make a spot in the unending hours. They played war games chiefly, imagining landings at various parts of Coral Territory and working up skill in serving the guns. Since there was abundance of shells for the three-inch, they even got in some practice with it, also with the light machine-gun. The tommy guns, with drums of ammunition ready, were placed here and there for quick reference in case of attack. There were some rifles, with no end of .25 caliber cartridges, but these they disdained.

Cox got a staff rigged with the silk flag, ready to run up either to call for help or to speak defiance. Also, mindful of how they had picked off the running Japs, Magruder got out everything white he could find, for coverage.

"If they do come, our one is to lie doggo," he said. "Uniforms show up too plain against this white coral and sand. Funny thing is, if there were two hundred of us we'd find ourself in hot water, but just two men—well, Hirohito wouldn't pay any heed to 'em."

"Three," said Cox. Magruder gave him a look of inquiry. "The Sarge. He's sticking around, isn't he?"

"I don't know, and neither do you."

"Sure I do!" asserted the bombardier. "The Sarge loved Betsy like a child. You can bet he's hanging around her right now. And those other guys who were here in the first place. All of 'em. Coral Territory is part of our country, isn't it? When a guy gets bumped off in these parts, where else can he go?"

This frightened Magruder. He was wise enough not to argue about it; Cox had an absolute fixed idea on the subject. Magruder himself, at times, was tempted to absurd thoughts and illusions, but fought resolutely against them. He hoped Cox would not go dotty about ghosts.

ONE day a queer thing happened. Their own yellow rubber boat, which was automatically released when the hatch was opened, had been ripped to pieces in the crash; not even the repair kit availed to make her serviceable. But, of an afternoon, a speck of yellow grew on the sea and came drifting in upon the tide, bobbing right along with the current that swept among the reefs. It was some other

aviator's rubber boat, and it was inflated; the attached bottle of CO_2 had been used, and the packet of emergency rations was missing. Nothing to tell where it came from.

There was something gruesome and terrible about this arrival from nowhere and far more so when Magruder figured out its story. They turned the "doughnut" over and saw a lot of small patches along the edges and bottom. The repair kit had been just about used up putting them in place.

"No telling where it came from; must have come a long way," he said, looking down at the thing with darkening eyes. His bronzed features were grave. "But this chap had one hell of a time."

"How you figure that?" demanded Cox.

"He landed all right somewhere at sea; the rations are gone, but he didn't starve to death. See those patches? We've heard plenty about how sharks like these yellow doughnuts—how they rub against 'em and nibble at 'em. That's what happened here. The CO_2 flask is empty, too—not a sizzle in it."

"I don't get the idea," said Cox, puzzled.

"Well, a shark nibbled. To repair the hole, this guy had to slip into the sea and work. Happened nearly a dozen times. That damned shark must have stuck right with him. See what would have happened to us if we'd come down at sea? This guy either got grabbed just after he had fixed the last hole, or else he went off his nut completely and slid overboard, and the shark got his meal and quit."

Cox shivered. He stared at the doughnut with brooding eyes.

"I expect you'll claim the thing got here by accident," he observed. "But it didn't. It was steered here. That guy was making for the nearest U. S. soil, and this is it, pard. Probably the Sarge went out to meet him and helped fetch it here. No, sir, this was no happenstance! You can't tell me it was."

Magruder swallowed hard, but proffered no objections. Never argue with a screwy guy; it only makes him worse.

"Well, now we've got a boat, so we can paddle around and do some fishing," he said.

A bright thought. For the next two days they did little except make use of the rubber boat; once they blew off the island and had the devil's own time paddling back. There were no sharks about, luckily.

"I guess this place must be quite a rendezvous for guys who have passed out," said Cox, as they were shaving on the third morning. "If we only could see them, there must be a crowd hanging around. Coral Territory would have a big voting list—"

"Lay off it, will you? Lay off!" broke out Magruder.

"Okay," said Cox, surprised but complaisant. He strolled off toward the shore, then came back on the hop. "Hey! Why did you deflate the doughnut?"

"I didn't."

"Well, somebody did. She was blown up last night and now she's flat as a pancake!"

Magruder hurried along with him. Sure enough, the rubber boat was flat and nothing to account for it.

"It's a sign, that's what," Cox declared in his serious, matter-of-fact way. "I'll bet the Sarge did it, or maybe the guy who fetched it here."

"You're nuts," said Magruder, exasperated. "A sign of what?"

"Trouble. A sign that we're not to budge out in that doughnut again."

"Now look," Magruder said patiently. "This coral is sharp as hell in spots. The rubber got chafed somewhere and sprang a leak, that's all. We can blow her up a bit and put her under water like an inner tube, and find the spot by the bubbles.

We've got the CO_2 flask and the repair kit from our own outfit to use."

Cox shook his head dubiously.

"You can if you like. Not me! We'd be in a fine fix if the Nips showed up while we were paddling somewhere off Cape Lookout or Radio City! No, sir, I know a sign when I see it. I'm going to load up that ack-ack gun right now and fill the belts on the machine-gun."

"Better eat first," snapped Magruder. "If you're so darned certain about your sign, we'd better fill our bellies. I'll have a porterhouse steak, nice and juicy, and not too well done, and a dozen eggs and some prime bacon. And don't burn the toast."

Cox grinned at this and grudgingly said breakfast might come first; and so it did.

Coral Territory was an unsteady sort of thing; it was always trembling. When the tide was on the make, the surf battered the long reefs ferociously, making the whole island shiver underfoot. The surf was worse than usual this morning, just now the tides being extra high.

MAGRUDER went at the job of fixing the doughnut himself. Sure enough, he found a couple of spots where the coral must have chafed through the stout rubber, and he set about making repairs. It was quite a job, and he took the deflated boat up under shelter of the sheds, as the morning sun grew hotter. Cox's fixed idea about ghosts weighed his mind heavily. Too bad, he thought, that the little fellow had these crazy notions. It was a bad sign. He glanced up and noted that Cox, sure enough, was pottering around with the artillery. For the two guns taken off Betsy they had fixed up finger triggers to replace the automatic triggers, and had made a neat job of it. Cox was quite an adept with tools.

Magruder was aching for a cigarette when he got the patches in place. They had agreed not to smoke around these sheds where the gas and oil and explosives were stacked; also, with no supplies on hand, they were low on cigarettes and rationed them at the rate of four per day per man. Only a dozen or so now remained.

Stepping out from the shade, Magruder took out his first cigarette of the day and was in the act of lighting it when he heard Cox yell. He looked up. The bombardier was standing beside the Betsy's machine-gun nest and waving. Magruder swung around, took one glance at the horizon, and dived back to shelter of the shed. Cox likewise vanished, next instant.

She was coming in, not very high but fast, from the west. The morning sunlight etched her sharply as she came and distinctly showed the Jap insignia on wings and tail. Magruder, lying motionless, damned the binoculars that were not at hand; however, he could see her clearly enough. She was not large at all, just a tiny reconnaissance plane such as might be carried on any ship's deck and catapulted off. He could see two dots of heads craning over the side; she was coming lower to examine the islet. Down to a scant hundred feet, he judged.

She gave a sudden upward jump and zoomed up and over; the sight of Betsy lying there must have been quite a shock to the Nips. On past the far end, she banked sharply and came back, again dropping low to investigate. The absence of all life on the islet no doubt encouraged her to closer examination.

Then, suddenly, one of the Betsy's guns let go with a burst; that was Cox, unable to resist. The Jap was directly overhead at the instant, and before she was gone Cox gave her a second burst. Magruder, staring up, distinctly saw the heavy bullets ripping her apart. His heart jumped. He leaped to his feet, yelling frantically.

The plane never had a chance to take

fire. She just dived; she came down in the water right off Radio City and kept going. The water closed over her and that was all. The two Nips went with her and stayed with her.

MAGRUDER scrambled over to the guns and pounded Cox delightedly on the back. They yelled, stared at each other and the water, laughed together in wild delight.

"That's one for Betsy," said Cox. "I bet the Sarge is tickled about it!"

"Boy! You sure did it properly!" Magruder exclaimed. Then he fell sober. "Well, I guess you know what this means. She didn't just come from nowhere."

"You said it, Cap'n. Take a gander north by west."

Magruder looked. Sure enough, a smudge of smoke showed on the horizon.

"Okay," he said. "I'll hand it to you for your sign, Coxy. Let's get into our whites. And no use going easy on the cigarettes. Too bad you didn't bring that Nip down on the coral—we'd have likely got some good smokes out of her."

Cox grinned, though he was a bit pale around the mouth. He knew what was coming, all right.

"I expect we'd better use up that ack-ack ammunition first," Magruder said as they got into their white duds. "That is, if there are no other planes around. Likely that one was carried on a ship and was the only one. They'll guess there's something wrong when she doesn't report or show up; they'll spot the Fortress, too."

"Why the ack-ack gun, then?"

"Because she's got a damned good range and those little shells are deadly; but they're contact shells. If we can throw 'em into a ship, she's a goner. They'd be no good against a landing party. Not enough of 'em. And then there's the location of the gun, too, away from the others."

He had figured this out carefully, the ack-ack gun, an imitation of a Brenn model, being placed well off to one side by itself. There were only seven shells left for her.

With the binoculars, they watched from the ruined radio station as the smoke first blossomed, then became a dot; then two dots. Being an army man and not a navy flier, Magruder had no training in distinguishing ships, but here he needed none. Two craft were headed for the island. One was a freighter of some size, the other was a destroyer. Both were Japanese.

"Betsy must feel mighty gloomy," said Magruder, "to think of the fine big bull's-eye Jap marking on the for'ard deck of that freighter, and her lying here helpless to get in the air! Well, bud, that makes it pretty clear. No more planes. A transport filled with men to get the works here in shape, and a destroyer."

"Want to put up the flag?"

"Not yet. Not till we see if we can tempt them to come close. Once they know we're here and fighting, they'll shell the living guts out of Coral Territory."

"What we want, then, is to get the destroyer if we can."

Magruder made no answer, except a grunt, and looked at the wan moon, high in the sky. Most of the night and nights to come would be moonless; however, that three-inch gun had a range of five miles or so—in expert hands. No expert hands here.

"We'd better duck," he said. "They'll be watching."

Their white rags grotesque in the sunlight, they came back to the ack-ack gun, which no longer pointed skyward. Those seven little conical shells made the heart sink, so puny were they. After putting them into one of the quick-firing holders, they lit cigarettes and waited, watching the water.

The destroyer was now coming well ahead of the freighter, evidently running

in for a closer look at the island. The disappearance of that scouting plane must have puzzled the Nips considerably; but the immobile Fortress would be visible a long way off.

Oddly enough, Magruder felt unexcited, even a little depressed. Two men could not hope to do much of anything. He watched the destroyer as she came in toward the reef channel. Officers were clumped on her bridge, examining the shores; men were clumped about her guns fore and aft. She was ready for any trouble that might show itself.

"How far you want to let her come?" asked Cox hoarsely.

"Close as she'll come," replied Magruder. His mouth felt dry. "Once we use up those seven shells, you want to get to hell out of here. Over to the three-inch gun. That dugout she's in will give us protection."

"I'm a swell runner," said Cox. "Glad I smashed Betsy's bomb-sight. They won't get that, even if they do get us."

"Get ready to jump," said Magruder, passing him the glasses. "Watch where the first shell lands, then lift or depress her. We won't have any chance to play at range-finding. That twist in the channel, by the outer reefs, I figured at a thousand yards; she's there now. The gun's laid for five hundred, off that hummock of coral where we caught the devil-fish. Closer than that, she'd be coming ashore on us, so stand by."

He dropped his cigarette and went to the gun, and waited, wishing he knew more about artillery. An expert hand would hit those Nips like a bolt from the blue before they knew what had happened!

The destroyer had slowed speed. The freighter or transport was standing off about three miles, he calculated, evidently awaiting word before coming along. The destroyer evidently knew these waters well, probably had been here before. She was heading straight for the central lagoon. She was off the hummock now; she was dead in the sights—

Magruder sighed and went to work. He was not happy about it. The gun banged and jumped. The fumes hid the result from sight.

"Over her!" Cox came with a yell and grabbed the depressing wheel. "Not much, but a little. There y'are—now give her hell!"

THE destroyer was swinging around. The gun began to jump and the fumes hid her; Magruder fired the six remaining shells. He heard Cox yelling jubilantly, then scrambled up beside the bombardier and both of them legged it frantically for the cover of the dugout by the heavy gun. A shell exploded behind them, exactly beside the ack-ack gun; then hell broke loose all along the coral strand.

Before ducking for cover, Magruder looked at the destroyer; nothing seemed to have happened, but Cox was cursing and yelling in mad excitement. Then Magruder saw that something had indeed happened. The destroyer's guns were belching smoke and flame, but she was swinging farther and farther, quite aimlessly. And the tide was on the ebb now.

"By gad, she's going on that submerged reef!" yelled Cox. "That whole bunch of shells went into her stern, Cap'n! I could see 'em! She's knocked out!"

A shell burst overhead and he ducked for cover.

The destroyer was giving all she had, while she had it to give. Her shells burst chiefly around the ack-ack gun, then searched out everything in sight. A tremendous detonation shook the very ground under their feet; Magruder looked, to see the oil and gas and munitions sheds going up in an inferno of fire and black smoke. Then Cox grabbed his arm.

"Look! She's on the coral, heeling over —can't bring her guns to bear—"

So she was. Down by the stern, she had struck the coral hard. They could see the men on the deck getting to their feet after the shock.

"Let's go!" snapped Magruder. A burst of mad excitement went through him like an electric current. Both of them leaped for the three-inch gun controls. Like a wounded snake, striking frantically at nothing in blind ferocity, the destroyer was now sending a hail of machine-gun bullets at the island, giving the silent Betsy a thorough shooting-up. Through this conculsive madness the three-incher launched her shells, carefully, slowly, deliberately.

Magruder made two clean misses. By that time, lead was hurtling all around. Then the next shell went slap into her—and the next—and the next. Three in a row; then her decks lifted up in a tremendous burst of white, hiding her from view.

"That's it," said Cox hoarsely. "Steam; she's gone up. Some of those Nips may come across the channel and get ashore. See you later."

Magruder crawled out, watched Cox running and picking up a tommy-gun, and then sat down and looked at what had been the destroyer. It was unreal, incredible, past believing; but it was true. She was nothing but a hulk on the reef, vomiting black smoke and flame skyward. Finished, forever.

A few black dots appeared, swimming across the narrow channel. After a little, the chatter of Cox's tommy-gun lifted vibrantly and angrily, then it fell silent. Nothing more happened. Dull explosions took place aboard the burning destroyer. Her bows blew out, then she just burned. Cox came walking back. He did not seem particularly happy.

"I guess it was a hell of a thing to do," he said, then sat down and scowled at the water. "But hell! It had to be done."

"All finished?" asked Magruder, and Cox nodded. "Yes, it had to be done, old scout, so cheer up."

There was a whine in the air, a growing shriek like the trump of doom; they dropped flat, as a shell exploded fifty yards away. Now they remembered the freighter. She was firing a heavy gun and steaming away.

"She's lighting a shuck for home!" cried Cox. Magruder shook his head, and looked again at the pale high moon, and sighed.

"No such luck. Just getting out of our range. You'll see."

They did. She lay well off, a mere dot, and sent shells hurtling in regularly, to burst everywhere and anywhere. And nothing else happened.

MAGRUDER and Cox retired to the far end of the islet and stayed there. The smoke from the burning gasoline dump died out gradually. The destroyer smoked on by fits and starts. The shelling continued until the sun sank in red fury, then stopped.

"Now for it," said Magruder. "Here's the last cigarette; we'll divide it. Better go back and see what we can find to eat before it comes."

"Before what comes?" demanded Cox.

"Night. And landing barges."

They sat waiting under the stars, by the two guns taken from Betsy. The coral was all shell-pits, the sheds were gone, the ack-ack gun was gone. The flag still blew where Cox had mounted it during the afternoon. Darkness crept down upon the waters, but smoke hazed everything; only, from the nearer reefs, ran flashes of phosphorescence like pale moonbeams along the water, as the surf broke. No light showed anywhere.

What happened, there under the stars and smoke? It was impossible to say; two men could not watch everywhere. Betsy's

guns ripped out for the last time; a wild frantic chattering and screaming came from barges creeping in upon the lagoon, then the ammunition gave out.

They used the light Jap machine-gun after this, but not long. Barges must have come in at several points. Other machine-guns began to rip and chatter from the right and from behind. Cox cried out something and tumbled on his face and lay in a heap. Magruder felt a shock, then another shock, and that was really all that he remembered about it, for there was no pain at all, nothing to remember afterward. He was quite emphatic on this point.

"That's funny," said Rock Gordon. "You know, I always thought it must hurt like everything to—"

He blinked in surprise and sat silent, for he was talking to no one. The officer with the flyer's wings was not there at all; he was gone. Gordon looked around and found himself quite alone, the unlit cigar between his fingers. He frowned, shook himself, and looked at his watch, incredulous.

Four minutes past three! Four minutes had passed—why it was impossible! Yet the ice in his glass had not even melted. He lifted it and drank, and his hand shook a little.

"My God!" he said to himself. "Am I nuts or what?" There was no answer. He just sat there for a long while, looking out at the sun and the white coral and the reefs, and the iron framework of the Jap destroyer that showed at low water.

Gordon located the Clipper captain that evening, and handed him a radiogram.

"I wish you'd get this off for me," he said. "It's to the general manager of your line. Is it clear?"

The pilot glanced over the message. Astonishment came into his face.

"Good Lord, Mr. Gordon! Oregon earth —a ton of Oregon soil shipped here and put around those graves — why, do you know what that will cost?"

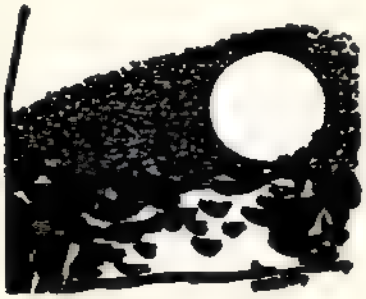
Gordon's flinty features hardened.

"Cost be damned!" he snapped. "Can it be done?"

"Yes, I suppose it can. But there's no necessity of that; the graves are well protected and cared for—"

"No necessity?" broke in Gordon, his words like bullets. "No necessity of anything, where dead men are concerned. That's the trouble with people like you, from Congress down. When a man's dead, there's no necessity of anything. Well, I want those two boys reburied in Oregon earth; I want a ton of it brought here and the job done properly, and I'll pay all expenses. And if anybody asks you why, the answer is that both Cox and Magruder would like it, and by God that's answer enough!"

So it was, too.



The Street of Faces

On trial before his elders the Chinese doctor knew he must contrive a delicate and devious plan to serve both country and his ancestors.

By FRANK OWEN

AS General Yoshida walked through the Street of Faces where the masks were made, the children fled from him in terror for he had no face, merely hideous scars and frightful purple blue welts. His eyes, however, were still able to function. Miraculously they had been spared by the bits of shrapnel that had sprayed his face. For weeks he had lain in a hospital, so long that many of the officers of his command believed he was dead, and those that visited him had grave doubts. General Yoshida he might be, but they could not be sure, for his face was unrecognizable and his voice was thick as he tried to speak. They could hardly understand him. To them it seemed hardly credible that their merciless general should

be reduced to such a pitiful wreck. He had always been cruel to his enemies, he never took prisoners, slaying them all in order to save rice. Many, he permitted his men to bayonet. It was good practice for them, it gave them certain pleasure, and more important still, it saved ammunition.

And now General Yoshida lay without a face, or at least a face that was recognizable. But his heart was strong and as he had lain there he had been busy plotting. In all China no man was a greater strategist, not even that recent premier who had won many a point by feigning illness and going to bed for a few days when his presence was vitally needed at a conference. Even without a face, Yoshida's black, shrewd heart was alert and plotting.

Entering the Street of Faces, General Yoshida went at once to the shop of Doctor Fang Kan, the only shopkeeper on the street who was a mechanic in human flesh. His brother, Fang Kee's shop next door was a kaleidoscope of color, not only did he create masks and puppets but also dragons for the Dragon Festival. Few cities in China had not had one of his magnificent dragons moving along its gay-decked streets.

Doctor Fang Kan had just partaken of a hearty meal and he was resting. Only the rich came to him and now in all of China no man was rich. But he was not perturbed.

The affairs of the country were his affairs. He believed with Confucius, that "to lead an uninstructed people to war is to throw them away." When called upon, he had given freely of his medical skill to reconstruct the wrecked features of soldiers. And he had done more. Though his manner was gentle, he walked by night and many was the Japanese who had the ill-fortune to encounter him on a lonely road. There was steel in his arm, and his strength was like unto that of five men. However, few knew of his great strength and so he encountered little opposition as he translated the Japanese.

General Yoshida, though he lacked a face, was buoyed up by arrogance. Despite the fact that he was frightfully disfigured, he was still a general. He had even walked in the presence of his glorious Emperor. When the festivities were over, the Golden Emperor had been locked up once more in his palace until it should be time to parade him again on a similar occasion.

DOCTOR FANG KAN'S eldest son had been killed when the Japanese invaded the Philippines. Fang Kan had stood before the gods in his temple and taken a vow that ten Japs should die for every season his son had lived. Nor did he spend time in grieving. There was a mighty work to do. Time for grief would come afterward. China had been invaded. The Spectre of War had left many deep and agonizing wounds. Hunger was riding rampant. Disease was held somehow in check. Each night Fang Kan walked, and Japs were dying. Other men walked by night. The farmer who plowed his field by day, at night turned into a stalwart warrior. Even cooks left their employer's home when the evening meal had been cleared away. Little wonder therefore that the soldiers believed the late evening air of China was unhealthy for the Nipponese. They longed for their homes in Tokio, Osaka and Yokahama which so few of them would ever see again.

General Yoshida was angered that Doctor Fang Kan did not get up to meet him as he entered the shop, but he did not show his true feelings, for arrogance is a sorry flag to be waved by a man who has no face. Hanging on the wall were a few written pictures, while here and there were displayed masks from his brother's factory. One might have been Hirohito, but the general did not notice, so an explosion was avoided.

"I am General Yoshida," said the little man curtly.

"You wish me to make you a new face?" asked the doctor gently. His manner was too abrupt to please Yoshida but after all one glance at him was sufficient to suggest his mission.

"If you are Doctor Fang Kan."

"You have come to the right place. What kind of a face would you like to have? Evil I suppose."

"Do you want your shop destroyed?" cried the general.

"In that case," was the tranquil reply, "what a pity it will be that you will have to pursue conquests with a destroyed face."

"There are other doctors."

"Plenty, famed for acupuncture, and the intricacies of the pulse; to dispel a fever, or to prepare tonics but, alas, in the entire province I alone meddle with faces. When a great man loses 'face' he comes to me I can remove blemishes of every kind but not the eternal blemish of oppression. At the time of the Chin Dynasty, at about the time the Great Wall was completed, one of my ancestors of reverred memory was known as 'The Doctor of Lip Repair.' It was one of the earliest recorded operations in the medium which our American comrades in arms speak of as 'Plastic Surgery.' Even then, vanity was rampant and my illustrious ancestor amassed a considerable fortune. His healing art, he taught to his son, who taught it to his eldest son and so on down through the centuries. And every son was named Fang Kan. I am fortunate to have been the recipient of this elegant heritage. Frequently we have had doctors in China whose sole claim to knowledge has been that they could wield a pen, for no special medical training was necessary for them to go about among the sick. It is because of them that we have such sayings as: 'To take no medicine is the best cure' and 'Medicine does not kill, the physician kills.' However, in the days of the Chou and Chin Dynasties medicine attained a high degree of development and doctors were superior men. So also have been the long line of 'Lip Repairers' who are known as Fang Kan."

"Very interesting!" spat out Yoshida, "but of what interest is that to me?"

"Certainly, to you of all people, my qualifications as a physician should be of prime importance. However, I should add, that the good surgeon first cures the ills of the nation, then human ailments."

"You mean China must be healed of her wounds before you will help me?" There was little bombast in the general's tone now.

"It's an interesting kernel to chew on, but I will not hold you to it even though the urge to do so is great. But that, too, will come when the dragons that guard our earth and sleep under our mountains grow weary of this war and spew out all invaders wherever they lie festering."

Doctor Fang Kan was in an amiable mood. He closed his eyes so that no single glitter of his thoughts might shine through them. Yes, it would indeed be a great moment for him when Yoshida lay at the mercy of his knife. If the knife took matters into its own hands and snuffed out a despicable, arrogant life, the air of China would have a whiff of garden freshness. Fang Kan's garden was small but he seldom slept without walking in it for awhile before retiring. That night the chrysanthemums would report to him that all was well.

GENERAL YOSHIDA had the sudden fear that the operation might never be performed, that at the last moment Fang Kan might decline the honor that was offered to him.

However, his fears were allayed when the doctor began speaking once more. "There was an occasion when a man came to me who had the appearance of a wolf.

This was decidedly awkward in his business for he was a pirate, a brigand, captain of a junk that went about in the China Seas, exacting toll from all those too weak to resist. Frequently, while vacationing on shore, he concocted various nefarious schemes that were not very successful because the intended victim always looked at his face and saw the shadow of a wolf in his expression. So he came to me. He wanted to be made over, so that his expression might be that of a philosopher. I acceded to his wishes. I gave him a handsome, gentle, benign expression. Nevertheless the shade of the wolf still peeped out from his eyes. I was satisfied, however, for I am a Doctor of Lip Repair. I cannot operate on the eyes."

"Very interesting," said Yoshida meekly. To try to frighten the doctor with an overbearing manner was as hard as getting a mountain to follow one down the road. However, there was still hope that the doctor might indirectly help him with his carefully worked out plans. After all he was not a brigand, nor did his appearance suggest that of a wolf. A parallel was lacking in the story. He was a noble member of the Bushido though without some semblance of a face it would be hard to convince anyone of his high position. Never once did it enter his smug little mind that he was placing himself at the entire mercy of Doctor Fang Kan's knives, nor that frequently, in the annals of the world, sharp knives had cut history into interesting and more serviceable patterns.

"I will start molding a new face for you tomorrow morning," said Fang Kan, "be here with the first streaks of dawn. If you are late, I shall refuse the job."

That night the doctor spent long hours in his garden. It was refreshing to hear the wind chattering in the tall bamboo. When daylight cleft the sky with streaks of light, like new-drawn swords, his knives would be at work on the loathesome Yoshida. It was a pleasant task to contemplate. But who would guarantee that it would be successful? And yet, unaccountably, fear cluttered his heart. He was weary beyond all understanding. He sat down on a marble bench. Oddly he had the feeling that there was someone at his back. Perhaps it was Yoshida anticipating his own actions, with a knife equally as sharp as any the doctor might use in his operations. He shook his head, and closed his eyes. Angered he was at the thought that thought of death should terrify him. In these hours of torture for China, with women and children being blown to pieces by bombs and aged, wounded people, with blind eyes groping along furrows that once were roads, death was more precious than life and a deal kinder. Let Yoshida strike, it would not matter. He was not afraid of the future. He was without debt and had taken good care of the ancestral tablets. But still the feeling of horror persisted. With considerable effort, he turned his head and looked in back of him. No one was there and yet a short distance away, a long line of figures in dark robes were entering the garden. Silently, like slim ghosts they came. What matter that there was no gateway within the shadows from which they emerged? In regular order they took their places in front of him, like unto an audience before the dais of a story teller. Some looked very old, none looked young. And all had a vague something about them, a kinship with him that he could not explain.

Then understanding came to him, these were his ancestors, these were all the long line of doctors of which he was the living symbol. All of them were or had once been doctors named Fang Kan.

Cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. His eyes felt like ice in their sockets. His very marrow had frozen and his blood had ceased to flow. This was ignominy indeed. He was on trial before his elders.

Not one of these doctors had ever lost a patient, had ever been guilty of treachery. And he was planning the destruction of Yoshida while pretending to rebuild his face. It mattered not to his ancestors how many Japanese he killed for China but they must not be his patients when their lives were snuffed out. These were the men who had glorified surgery. Through the ages they had built up a family reputation that was written in living ink in the Annals of China. It must not crumble because one of their number had failed in his duty.

Dew was dropping from the tall trees, and there was chill in the air. The music of the bamboos was a dirge. No longer was there perfume in that garden, and the night sounds were stilled. The doctor's eyes were unaccountably keen. Why should all his ancestral doctors appear before him to balk the decomposition of General Yoshida? Was not a dead enemy, a friend?

Outside the wall, a Drunken Dragon, that is a poet, was walking somewhat unsteadily homeward, and in direct violation of the edicts of the Japanese Army, he was filling the air with song:

"Sing to your heart's content, for gods and ghosts there be.
How do I know I shall not die of hunger and fill the gutter?"

THE sound of the booming voice broke the spell, the night sounds stirred into life. Doctor Fang Kan gazed about him in bewilderment. Gone were the ghosts of his ancestors. But the memory of them filled his thoughts, nor did he forget their message. Though they had not spoken, their presence was enough. He knew as surely as though their wishes had been written in flaming characters on the sky. But still the desire to dispose of General Yoshida once and forever had grown to be a craving he could not assuage.

The light of morning was burnishing the eastern sky. He bathed his face in the water of a spring. It cooled his forehead, and washed away the ice beads of perspiration. There was work for him to do. As he walked into his shop, Yoshida was waiting for him.

Doctor Fang Kan's greeting was perfunctory. He motioned the general to follow him to the small, garden-facing room that he used as his surgery, though he preferred to call it the studio wherein he modeled faces. Yoshida was somewhat arrogant, showing not the slightest trace of fear. Apparently, he was unable to grasp the absurdity of it, a Chinese enemy doctor brandishing knives about his head and no one to witness whatever might happen. It was a moment for Yoshida to offer prayers to the gods of Shinto, but he was too busy plotting the future to worry about anything else.

And Fang Kan went to work. Dexterously he handled the knives, that lay in a friendly row on a table before him. The last knife in the line was long and thin and deadly. It might spell finis for the arrogant general. Or perhaps it would not speak at all. Fang Kan gathered sufficient skin from the chest and thighs of Yoshida to fashion a face and if he took off a trifle more skin than was needed, set it down as merely a guarantee against emergencies. Yoshida felt little pain for the doctor used an ancient local anaesthetic that was as soothing as a fragrant balm. As the surgery progressed, Doctor Fang Kan became so absorbed in his work, he forgot all else. No longer was he an enemy of this little faceless man, but a doctor performing an age-old miracle that had been handed down from father to son since the T'ang Dynasty. For hours he worked without cessation, as the day swallowed the sun. When the last beams of light had died, his task was done. Bandages had been applied to the sculptored likeness of a Chinese face.

At Fang Kan's command, servants car-

ried Yoshida gently to a pleasant room opening upon the garden, where he could rest, sleep, recover and forget for awhile that he was a despicable general, hated by all those who watched over him so carefully, fed him and saw to it that he was as comfortable as possible.

Meanwhile the doctor put on his ancestral robes, and repaired to a room where he could drink tea in quietude. Through the open window perfume drifted. Another night was upon him but now there was no longer fear. He had been true to ancestors, true to his surgical tradition and somehow he knew that all would work out satisfactorily for China. From the ancients, wisdom had come to him. The dead, wrapped in silence, had yet been able to convey their thoughts to him. Not for a moment did he believe he had been dreaming. That the ancestral doctors had come to him, he had no doubt, for it seemed no more absurd to him than the acknowledged fact that at the age of fifty a fox can take the form of a woman, and frequently does.

DURING the next few weeks, Yoshida had no reason to complain about the service that was given him. He was fed well and the bed was comfortable. The pillow, however, was too soft. He would have preferred one made of wood or porcelain as in his own land. Then, too, he was not used to sleeping on a bed. And for awhile he was worried about the little fireplace under it for heating in the winter months. Suppose some Chinese patriot should build a fire with heat enough to roast him to death. There was reason enough for worry, but of the doctor he was not afraid. He longed to rise from the bed and sleep on rugs spread upon the floor but he refrained. That might be interpreted as a mark of cowardice. So he endured the torture of a soft bed with pillows.

The morning came at last when the bandages could be removed. Trying to suppress his excitement, Yoshida looked into the mirror which the doctor obligingly held for him. The face that gazed out at him was that of a young Chinese with a friendly smile. Doctor Fang Kan had added the suggestion of a smile in a spirit of mockery. He knew that his people were always wary of a man who had a smiling face even though they were the most laugh-loving people in the whole world. Now, however, with China so grievously wounded there was no reason to laugh. Yet Yoshida smiled and was satisfied.

"How can I ever repay you?" he said jubilantly. Now he could be a menace to China without personal danger. He could kill at will, nor would he be suspected.

"You are satisfied then?" said the doctor softly.

"Abundantly."

"I am gratified. I was afraid you might be disappointed."

"What do you mean? I don't understand. Is not my face pale and round as the full moon."

"True, but it is the wolf story all over again. I wish I could have done something for your eyes."

"You mean my eyes are those of a wolf?" asked the general angrily.

"No, of a Japanese. In other words rapacious, crafty, drunk with power."

Yoshida made little attempt to hide his anger. "For your insults," he screamed, "I will cause your entire family to be wiped out, even your cousins and your father-in-law."

"We of China have grown used to death," was the gentle reply. "It is never further away than our fingertips. We fear it not, but you, preposterous General, will be in a difficult position. Unless you come to me every month, so that I may apply a special unguent to your face, it will wither and grow black, more frightful than

the smashed face with which you came to me. And people will shun you as though you had a plague. You will be friendless and alone and forced to live in a desert place."

Yoshida's attitude changed at once. "You are safe from me," he said, "and your offense will be overlooked."

"I wish I could grant you the same immunity, but I cannot. With a smiling face or not, you are vile. Nevertheless, I am your doctor and I wish my handiwork to be a success. I have never had the misfortune to fail in my surgical work. But now the time has come for you to pay for my services."

"Name whatever price you wish."

"My fee will not be large, merely any papers you may have in your pockets."

"I cannot accede to your wishes. My papers are of a secret nature. They must not be read by anyone."

"I do not wish to read them. If you wish we'll burn them right here."

As though the entire scene had been rehearsed, a servant brought a lighted candle.

"Give me the papers," the doctor directed.

RELUCTANTLY, Yoshida handed them over. At once the doctor applied them to the flame. They burned with considerable enthusiasm. When naught but ashes remained, Fang Kan collected them carefully, as though they were so much gold. "This is my fee and I am satisfied."

"I don't understand; they're only ashes."

"Put it down that I am eccentric, if you wish; or perhaps I do not care to risk carrying a large sum of money in my humble shop as long as so many of your soldiers are in the city. To accept gold, would place my life in jeopardy; by accepting ashes, I leave jeopardy to you."

"I was always bad at riddles."

"In time, this one will be solved for you. And now you may go, you are well enough to travel. One month from today return to my shop if that is possible."

"You can depend on it, I'll be back. I intend to take good care of my new face. If I can help it, it shall not wither."

So General Yoshida swaggered from the shop and along the Street of Faces. Children smiled at him in friendly manner as he passed. His body was all vice, but his face reflected virtue and children were no longer afraid of him. Now he could go wherever he wanted with immunity. He knew enough Chinese for the passing brief words he might be forced to utter.

Through Great Street he strode, glancing with simulated interest at the beautiful, vertical signs as though he was able to understand them. He was affronted by the fact that most of the men that passed him were taller than he was, nor did he notice that many of the elder shopkeepers, loitering in their doorways, looked askance at a Chinese wearing a Japanese uniform. Traitors were few in China and they found his presence among them an unpleasant novelty. However, there were many dark nights and eventually his time would come to hang up his hat.

General Yoshida decided that he would spend a few days with his troops, dispose of the despatches and letters that had accumulated in his absence. He would place Oshima in charge and then set out on his travels. Perhaps his fellow officers would like to give a large banquet at the hotel on the lake which they had taken over to use as headquarters. Perhaps when the Emperor heard of his exploits he would be given a high position with the war board in Tokio.

As he reached the outskirts of his own encampment, he was accosted by a Japanese sentry with a fixed bayonet. When he was about to speak, to explain his Chinese face, the sentry prodded him and the sharp bayonet bit into his flesh. Other soldiers came running up. They jabbered and gesticu-

lated excitedly. He wanted to tell them that he was Yoshida, supreme commander of all the troops, but they wouldn't let him speak. If he uttered a sound, he was stabbed viciously. They were dunderheads. It was inglorious misunderstanding. A member of the Bushido to be exposed to such indignities. He remembered that he himself had instigated this form of bayonet practice. He had proclaimed that the steel tongue of a bayonet was very persuasive. Now it was being used on his noble person, but the culprits would pay. He'd see they were thrown into the lake, carrying full pack, and no one would be permitted to rescue them. If they succeeded in fighting their way ashore, they'd be thrown in again until they ceased to struggle.

GENERAL YOSHIDA'S hopes revived as he saw Oshima approaching. Colonel Oshima was a man of culture and refinement. He had been educated in China but had absorbed little of Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless he was of a kind nature. He hated to harm anyone except his enemies. With them he was a past master of Gestapo methods. Not even Germany's Himmler could excel him in wanton cruelties. He hunted down all those who were opposed to the Bushido as relentlessly as a hunter stalks his prey. But as an officer, General Yoshida could find no fault with him. He was a bright exponent of military discipline. Surely Oshima would release him from this stupid and painful position in which he had inadvertently placed himself.

However, as Oshima came toward him, Yoshida's hopes perished. There was blood in his eyes, the lust for killing. He had killed more prisoners than any other officer on Chinese soil. Most of his associates permitted the soldiers to do their butchery.

But Oshima liked to be in on the kill. And so he came up to this new prisoner with the friendly Chinese face. How dared he wear the uniform of a Japanese general. Bushido must be avenged.

General Yoshida uttered an agonizing shriek as Oshima seized a rifle from one of the guards.

A single vicious thrust of the bayonet and Yoshida's heart was impaled. Oshima smiled. He seldom missed. Death by a single blow. It was rather a pity that the prisoner had not been subjected to torture, for torture gave the soldiers something to do, kept them near camp, for there were no theatres nearby and when they were too long without action, the troops grew restless.

All day the body of Yoshida lay where it had fallen. He was very fortunate. His Chinese face was not even scratched. The operation by Fang Kan had been enormously successful.

The Unfriendly World

By ALLISON V. HARDING

I FIRST heard about George Torey when a colleague of mine at Belvedere Hospital where I am on the psychiatric staff came to me and said: "Dr. Manning, I've got a patient who won't sleep. From the medical standpoint, he seems on the mend . . . but he has a strange fear of sleep. I wonder if you'd look in on the case?"

That was the beginning. Dr. Cobb, the M.D. in charge, gave me the following details: Torey had been in an automobile accident. He had been pretty badly smashed up A couple of .broken ribs, a dislocated elbow and a badly wrenched back. But there didn't seem to be any complications, at least, at first. But by now, when he should be getting well—he wasn't. He was afraid of going to sleep. A thirty-year-old man afraid of going to sleep like, well, like a little kid.

"I've come to the conclusion that there must be some sort of mental hitch here somewhere," Cobb told me that first day in the doctors' lunchroom. "Mr. Torey keeps begging for sedatives at night, for sleeping medicines. Yet he admits he isn't in pain. If we won't give them to him, he tries to keep himself awake. Of course, I've asked him to explain his horror of sleep. He tells me the most outlandish stories." Dr. Cobb shook his head.

I asked the nature of these stories. Cobb hesitated, then said, "I'd like you to get the whole picture directly from him. Can you come up this afternoon?"

I said I'd work it in somehow.

I confess I didn't think much more about Mr. Torey for the rest of the afternoon.

After all, we psychiatrists see many patients who are afraid of about everything, including going to sleep. It's not uncommon in a case of overwrought emotions. Torey, from Cobb's description, had had quite a smash-up. My snap hunch was that the man was still suffering from the after-effects of severe shock. That's all I thought about it.

At 4:30 that afternoon I went upstairs and asked the floor nurse for Mr. Torey's room. When I went in, Cobb was waiting for me. He grabbed my hand as though he were really glad to see me and led me over to the bed.

"Mr. Torey, this is Dr. Manning. He's the chap I've told you about. I think he's going to be able to help us with your sleeping difficulties."

Torey simply groaned. I still hadn't gotten a look at him. His head was turned in toward the wall. One lean hand was visible, clutching the bed clothes in a vise-like grip.

All attempts to invade a world outside our own should be discouraged! Such an invasion would be fraught with deadly consequences too horrible for beings of this earth to confront.

COBB stood uncertainly for a minute and then said, "I'll leave you alone with Mr. Torey." I heard him go to the door and close it softly behind him.

I pulled a chair up close to the bed. Torey still kept his face toward the wall.

"Well, now," I started in a hearty voice I meant to be reassuring, "What's the trouble? I'd like to hear all about it." And so saying, I laid my hand on his.

He jumped as though somebody had stuck a knife in him. Then he groaned again. Still not a word.

I considered the next best approach. It was then that I noticed the window was wide open. It was getting late in the afternoon and, as much to recoup my own forces, I walked over and started to lower it.

My back was to Torey. But he must have heard the sound of the window. He let out a low groan and when I turned he was sitting straight up in bed with a look of terror on his face that even I, used as I am to the terrifying grimaces of crackpots and criminals, found disquieting.

He pointed toward the window, or so I thought, and then sank back on his pillow. When I reached him, his face and arms were covered with sweat. Either extreme weakness, I thought automatically, or—extreme terror.

"Mr. Torey, won't you try and tell me what's bothering you. I want to help you. Dr. Cobb tells me you're coming along very nicely, all except along certain nervous lines." I kept my voice low and confidential this time. "Come on now, let's hear it. You'll find me a very good listener."

George Torey turned then and for the first time I really saw him. He had the high forehead and sensitive face of a man of great intellectual capacity. That face was drawn and twisted by fear now. I was almost startled by his appearance. But he seemed to find something reassuring in my appearance for he twisted himself on his back.

I noticed he kept looking out the window of the hospital. Outside the early spring afternoon was passing into a soft dimness that preludes twilight.

"Tell me, what was it about my shutting the window that caused you to cry out just now." Perhaps there was a clue here to his strange behavior. "Is it that you are bothered by things being shut, a sort of fear of closed spaces?"

Torey smiled at that. For the first time, then, I heard him speak. His voice was cultured, controlled, though somewhat weak.

"No, Doctor, I am not troubled with claustrophobia. It's something else. Something that seems, seems quite incredible. I am intelligent enough to know that I dread the night, and when I heard you at the window, it made me realize another night was coming. It is bizarre, no, it is fantastic, absurd. I cannot expect anyone to believe." His voice shook at the end of his speech and fearful of disturbing him more, I just nodded my head slowly and once again gave him a reassuring pat on the arm. He went on: "I'm afraid to go to sleep because, because of something that happens to me when I go to sleep. I—I can't make anybody believe me—but if there is a Hell, I've been there—I've seen people there with harpoons—" He stopped abruptly. I said nothing.

WE STAYED like that for a moment, neither of us saying a word and yet I could feel that he wanted to tell me more about this thing that was eating away at his mind. For a minute, I felt a bit of resentment toward prosaic Dr. Cobb who had refused to tell me the details of this man's aberrations, but instead had simply said, with a rather weary, noncommittal shake of his head, "But I'd rather you'd get the whole picture from him direct."

Torey sat there, his lips tightly shut, his fists clenched on top of the coverlet. The perfect picture of a man trying to hold on, I thought, trying to hold on against loss of his reason, against a terror so great that it had come out of him and spilled over onto his face and into his voice.

I leaned forward again. "Won't you tell me more, Mr. Torey?"

I could see a glimmer of impatience push aside the apprehension on his face for a minute. Then his lips closed all the tighter and he turned his face toward the wall like a spoiled child.

I'll confess that as I got up from his bedside I was a bit exasperated. But underneath that irritation was a small core of uneasiness. There was something here that I couldn't quite pigeon-hole. I had seen very little of George Torey. But I had seen enough to firmly believe that here was a man who was in mortal terror for his very life.

I ran into Dr. Cobb in the corridor outside. He stopped me.

"Well, how did things go?"

I'm afraid I looked rather downcast. I shook my head with a half smile. "I don't think I enlisted Mr. Torey under my banner, Cobb. He didn't tell me a thing."

I then gave Cobb a detailed description of what had gone on.

Cobb slapped me on the back reassuringly. "Don't let it irritate you, Manning," he said. "He's one of those birds who makes life pretty hard for a doctor. He thinks we don't understand," Cobb mimicked with his face screwed up, "He doesn't want to get well and this is a method to get attention."

What a method, I thought to myself and we went down the hall to the conference room. And in my heart I wasn't so sure about things.

The next day I had forgotten about the Torey case pretty much. Then Cobb sent for me in the afternoon. He told me he had had another terrible night with Torey. Would I look in on Torey again and try to talk things over. Of course I agreed.

As Cobb was thanking me I held up my hand. "But, Doctor, I still don't know much of what's going on. You remember you wanted me to get the details from Torey himself. I didn't get far. I'm completely in the dark. Exactly what is this thing he's afraid of? Does he know? Do you know?

Cobb turned at the door and grinned back at me.

"Spears," he said smiling, "twisted little people with spears in some horrible nether land." I heard him chuckling as he left the room.

I SAT for quite a while thinking over the situation. Spears, and twisted little people in some nether land? It sounded like the Arabian Nights to me. Yet try as I might I could not get myself away from my hunch-faith in George Torey's sanity and intelligence.

With Cobb's permission I had a talk with Miss Foster, Torey's private nurse who had been on the case since the auto accident. Mabel Foster was one of those trim, attractive, and very efficient young ladies who is not given to speculation and wild flights of fancy. She'd taken good care of some of my own cases and I knew her work.

She told me, as had Cobb, that George Torey had been afraid of something from the time he had entered the hospital. He had fussed and fretted. The staff thought it was the result of a caved-in side and his general shaking up. But even after he had improved physically, he still remained just as nervous and kept pleading for sleeping drugs—long after Dr. Cobb felt they were no longer necessary. Finally, Dr. Cobb had refused to give in to him.

And it wasn't simple insomnia, for Torey could go to sleep perfectly well

without medication, said Miss Foster. But he always seemed to have terrible nightmares when he slept without drugs. At least that's what they thought. He had called out several times in his sleep, muttered and cried out, and carried on the craziest sort of conversations. The next morning, he told Dr. Cobb some cock-and-bull story that he couldn't sleep any more without medicine. Cobb would give in to him for a while, but every time he would try to give up the sedatives, Torey would refuse to go to sleep.

"And, Doctor," Miss Foster confided to me, "he does the most outlandish things to keep himself awake. He has tried to cut himself with the silverware and burn himself with the hot food. He recites things out loud and when we try to quiet him down, he says he's got to keep himself awake." The nurse set her mouth grimly. If it was anybody else but Miss Foster, I knew she would have added: "He's crazy."

Later I asked Cobb if I might come around and be with Torey that evening. He complied with some joshing remarks warning me about spears and the twisted people.

THAT night I went in to see George Torey at about nine o'clock. He was ready for the night . . . at least as far as Belvedere Hospital was concerned, but certainly not as far as George Torey was concerned.

He was sitting bolt upright in bed with the determined look of a man who won't admit that night has come and it is time to rest . . . or who is afraid to admit it . . . for Torey had that same haunted look about him that had struck me on my first visit to him. Cobb came and I watched the argument between doctor and patient about sleeping drugs. Cobb was adamant. He would not go on giving sleeping drugs when there was no longer any reason for their use. He turned to me for support on this point and I inclined my head in what I hoped was professional agreement, yet lacking in opposition to Torey. Miss Foster took Torey's pulse and filled his decanter of water. Foster and Cobb went out. The window was open and the April air was soft and good. A swell night for sleeping, I thought whimsically. And here before me was a man who wouldn't let himself sleep.

I had long ago discarded one of the theories that Dr. Cobb had advanced, namely, that Torey was, or was developing into a drug fiend. There didn't seem to be anything in his record to indicate this. His craving for sedatives was not as simple as all that.

I had been lost for a minute in my own contemplation of the case when Torey broke the silence.

"Dr. Manning," he whispered as though afraid he might be overheard, "will you please give me something to make me sleep?"

I smiled kindly at him.

"Dr. Cobb and I think you can do all right without anything, Mr. Torey," I admonished.

"I know . . . but you're wrong. For God's sake, Doctor, you've got to help me." Torey was getting into one of his emotional states, I thought professionally.

"Both your nurse and Dr. Cobb have told me that you have no difficulty in getting to sleep if you'll only let yourself . . ."

"That's the trouble," Torey broke in with an obvious effort to keep his voice steady. "My trouble is in keeping myself awake. I get so tired, so terribly tired, and I want to sleep. But I don't dare."

"Don't be childish, man. What's there to be afraid of in sleep? Why, on a night like this, it's great to sleep—unless you're a doctor and can only look forward to being wakened up by some patient with the

heebie-jeebies," I ended with an attempt at humor.

"You don't understand," Torey said mournfully.

"Well, try to make me. I told you once that I am a very good listener."

"You'll think I'm crazy. You'll think I'm absolutely out of my mind. And I'm not. Because I can prove it. I told these things to Dr. Cobb and he laughed at me. Oh, yes, he was very kind to me in the beginning. He said it was my accident and that I'd be all right after a few weeks here. But then when I tried to explain that what I am afraid of has nothing to do with the accident, he got out of patience with me and then he refused to give me my medicine and so I can't sleep. . . ." Torey sobbed like a child. I confess I felt sorry for him. . . .

I took a deep breath. "Does all this have something to do with the twisted little creatures and spears?"

He gasped when I said that and his face paled under the yellow light of the bedlamp. "Dr. Cobb told you."

I nodded.

"And you think I'm crazy? Go on, you do, don't you. You're a psychiatrist, Doctor. You think you understand me. You think I've got a fixation on this sleeping business. Well, you're wrong and yet how can I show you without, without—" Torey sobbed again.

I REMAINED in my chair next the bed. It suggested itself to me that the only way to handle this man was to be harsh. "Look, Torey. Let's stop these games. Tell me what's going on. I want to hear the whole story. I'm tired of these hints. I want to hear the whole works. Now either you'll tell me or you won't. If you do, I'll try to help you. If you don't, I'll get out." I know this sounded pretty tough, but sometimes with a hysterical patient that is the only way to act.

Torey clenched and unclenched his fists for a few minutes and then murmured, "All right. I'll try and tell you, just as I've tried to tell the others. But how can you or they know. None of you has ever been there."

I pulled up closer to the bed and nodded reassuringly. I prompted "Let's go."

"I won't go into all my past history," started Torey, "because that has no bearing on what I'm going to tell you. I have nobody in the world but an uncle—at least I think I still have him (I noted this strange phraseology at the time). My father and mother died before I can even remember. I lived with my mother's brother. It was the only home I ever knew. He treated me well. He was eccentric, but brilliant in his field. Perhaps, Dr. Manning, you have heard of him. Allan Forter?"

The name clicked. Forter was one of those psychical researchers, those dabblers in occult manifestations, who is always coming up with strange ideas and experiments, some of which seem to be sheer quackery but others startling, brilliant, inexplicable.

Torey went on. "My uncle had one particular brain child. It was an invasion of a world that he believed was near us. Very near—and accessible to all of us. Perhaps if not by our physical bodies, then by our spiritual beings. . . ." Torey smiled, "Oh, yes, Uncle believed in the spiritual world far more than you doctors seem to."

"Anyway, this land is accessible at only one time. That time is nebulous, indefinite. And it is more than time. It is a state of mind, a place, a condition. It can most nearly be approximated when one is about to go to sleep." Torey looked at me eagerly.

I'm afraid I must have presented a pretty picture of almost bovine incomprehension. I didn't see what he was getting at.

"Go on," I urged, wrinkling my brow. "Where does this get us. I'm interested in you, and not your uncle."

Torey went on, "But, Doctor, that's just it. My uncle began to develop a theory giving a person the ability to slip a part of his spiritual being into this nether world between the sleeping and waking worlds. He believed in strange, exotic adventures there. He speculated on what could be done to project oneself into this world physically as well as psychically."

"Naturally I became excited. I tried too. I failed many, many times. I could not seem to develop the right conditions in myself and my environment."

"Well," I interrupted, "that's all very interesting but what has this got to do with you now?"

"Because, Doctor," Torey paused ominously, "where my uncle failed, I now have succeeded. I can project myself into this place, this land . . . and I wish to God I couldn't. For I am no longer able to lose this ability. To return to normal. And it is a ghastly place. It is inhabited by things and people that must be the accumulation from countless hideous nightmares of the ages."

And Torey, finishing, lay back awaiting some reply from me.

I found myself at a loss for words for a moment. Torey was staring at me, obviously expecting me to say something. I think he half expected me to laugh at him as the others had done. To myself I decided quickly that here was a man who needed my help. Whatever the ins or outs were, Torey was beset by a dreadful fear. It was up to me to help him.

I cleared my throat at last. "That's all very interesting. Can you tell me a little more about the way you are able to project yourself into this, this in-between land?"

Torey seemed relieved that I wasn't laughing at him. That is one of the first things a psychiatrist realizes. That no matter how absurd the fear or fixation may seem to outsiders, it is very, very real to the sufferer.

As I think back on the scene in the bedroom that night, I can remember how eagerly George Torey leaned forward then. How eagerly he described in detail just what his uncle had attempted and what he himself had finally experienced. When he finished, I snapped a surreptitious glance at my watch and found it was nearly ten o'clock.

"Look, Torey," I suggested. "Suppose you go ahead and try to get some sleep. I'll stay right here with you for a while, if you'd like, and if you get these sensations or fears, why we'll take care of you. How about it?"

His face fell a bit then. I think my choice of the word "sensation" was unfortunate. He immediately took me to task. "Doctor, this isn't an idea. It isn't a feeling. It is a place. We are all susceptible to it."

HE WENT on almost desperately. "You, Doctor, how many times have you lain in bed at night and begun to drift off to sleep. You know that there is a moment—or call it what you will in terms of measuring time—a space or condition that is not wakefulness, yet is not sleep. People call it being 'half-awake' but they do not know just exactly what they mean. It is a commonplace, so nobody has ever given it any thought. But it is an experience that we have all had, maybe not consistently or often but at some time or another. You've experienced it yourself, Doctor."

I admitted, somewhat grudgingly I am afraid, that I thought I knew what he meant. But I was perfectly satisfied with the casual phrase, "half-awake."

Torey was impatient now. Perhaps he had seen me look at my watch, and was afraid I'd leave him. He rushed on. "There is more to it than that. There are

many things that only need to be developed to become what we might call supernatural."

I admitted that he had something there.

"Look here," I said. "We've talked long enough about this. You've interested me but now it's time for you to get some rest. After all, you want to get out of this hospital eventually, don't you? And at the rate you're going, well—" I ended my incomplete sentence with a laugh that was meant to be cheery. It echoed hollowly around the small hospital room. Torey's face was as funereal as the sound of that laugh.

"You win, Dr. Manning. But will you look in on me in a little while. Please promise me that. I'm so afraid that—"

I cut George Torey short by rising to my feet and crossing to the bed where I slapped him reassuringly on the arm. "You bet I will, Mr. Torey. Now you curl up and get some sleep. Let us take care of the spears."

Torey forced a sickly grin and turned on his side, his face to the wall. I turned his light out and tiptoed out of the room.

There is something very lonesome about a hospital at night. The empty, soundproof halls are dreary tunnels of semi-darkness with only the light from the nurses' office reaching out to push back the dark. I paused long enough to say something to the white-capped girl in charge and then went to my quarters at the other end of the building for a smoke and some coffee. Belvedere Hospital is in a suburban district and at night is very quiet. There are no other big buildings near. I looked out my window at the darkness that surrounded the hospital like a high wall. The wind that came in my window as I stood there smoking was soft and soothing.

Frankly, I had to remind myself of my promise to Torey to look in on him a bit later in the evening to keep from flinging myself down on my bed and going to sleep.

I picked up one of the latest medical journals and began to thumb aimlessly through the pages. But my mind kept going back to Allan Forte and his nephew upstairs. And I kept wondering about the nether land. I jokingly promised myself that I would try to project myself into it when I finally went to bed that night.

My watch showed nearly 11 p. m. when I left my room. One of the young internes on duty spoke as I passed: "A beautiful spring night, Dr. Manning." I nodded absently.

COMING to Torey's floor, I stopped in and spoke to the nurse again. She told me she had already looked in on Torey and everything seemed all right. I went down to his room, let myself in quietly and sat down in a chair near the bed. It was chilly and I lifted one of the extra blankets off a stool nearby, throwing it around my shoulders and then settled back again.

I chided myself a bit. I hadn't gone in for "night-watching" at a patient's bed since my interning days. Torey was on his side, face towards me, sound asleep. I don't know how long I sat there. I think the nurse looked in once, as Cobb had instructed her to do, and seeing me sitting there in the dark had gone away again. My actions must have amused her. Dr. Manning, young but moderately well-known psychiatrist, hovering near an insomniac's bedside like a Mother Hen.

Anyway, I went to sleep. And without stopping to dally in any nether land. I had had a hard day. I was tired. The next thing I knew something was beating into my mind. A sound, not too loud. But persistent, annoying. As I came fully awake I realized suddenly where I was and what the noise was. It was Torey. He was crying in his sleep. And on his

face, turned toward me, was the most inexplainably horrified look that I have ever seen.

I realized that here was a great chance for me to get some dope on just what was in his mind. And yet from the look on the man's face I knew he was suffering terribly, even if it were only a nightmare. I recalled my promise to him, "to protect him from sleep." And yet, I felt I must try to grasp what was going on, that here might be a tip on what had a hold of his mind.

Torey's face screwed in agony, his lips mouthing syllables I could not catch.

I bent nearer.

His breathing attracted my attention. It was rapid and shallow. I thought fleetingly of some physical crisis that might have come upon him. Pulling his arm out from under the covers, I reached for his pulse. It was rapid, very rapid, but of good quality. His hand was sweating, his arm, whole body in fact, bathed in sweat.

Every now and then I could hear him say something.

"No, no," he groaned. "For God's sake, don't, don't. I swear I'll stay away. I won't come back." His voice took on the quality of a scream and then died away again. Torey's body writhed as though in some great agony.

I had about made up my mind to give up all attempts to analyze from his sleeping attitude and talk the cause of his fear. I was on the verge of waking him when a thought struck me. Had Cobb actually seen this man in the throes of one of these night attacks? I felt it was my duty to call Cobb. Torey's threshing and contortions were increasing. He was crying in a low voice, "No, no, oh God, don't, I won't ever come again. I swear I won't. I'll kill myself first."

And all the time he was wiggling and struggling as though fighting with somebody—or something. Absently, and in my distraught frame of mind, I passed my hands over him. Of course I felt nothing. I was displeased with myself afterward. Dr. Manning trying to corral creatures from a dream world! Next I would be mixing love potions to sell to heartsick young maidens!

I went quickly to the door, determined to get the nurse to call Dr. Cobb immediately.

I looked back once over my shoulder at Torey as I started to leave. I didn't want my patient to strangle himself in the bedclothes. In the dimness of the room Torey was waving both arms now. Then he jerked several times, screwed himself up into a tight ball, his head and arms disappearing underneath the bedding. And at this moment Torey screamed. At the same time I thought I caught the shadow of a black something over the bed, over Torey. I recalled this later, in the light of what happened, although at the time I dismissed it as preposterous and a figment of my imagination. But I caught a glimpse of a black shaft, a greater blackness against the semi-blackness of the room, shaped almost like . . . a spear!

WHEN Torey screamed I turned back into the room. I rushed to his bed and snapped on his light. I flicked down the emergency switch signaling for the nurse on duty. And then I began to shake Torey gently.

On the third or fourth shake I noticed the blood. It soaked up through the sheet and blanket. I pulled down the clothing feverishly and gasped at the sight of Torey's arm. There was a deep gash, several inches long, on his right forearm. It was bleeding profusely. And there was something else about the wound that caused me to catch my breath. At the same instant I realized Torey was awake. He was looking at me with a crooked smile on his white, sweat-dampened face.

Triumph cut through the pain that showed in his expression as he said to me:

"Well, Doctor, you see, I was telling the truth. I have been *there* this time again."

The nurse arrived and I sent her for Dr. Cobb. One of the internes came in and applied a tourniquet. Ten minutes later, Dr. Cobb arrived. His grumpiness disappeared at the sight of Torey's wound.

"How did this happen?" he barked as he made his examination. The nurse and the interne told him what they could. Then I told him I would like to speak to him alone. The door closed behind the other members of the staff and Cobb turned to me with a worried scowl on his face.

"Well, what is all this about, Manning? Did he try to kill himself?"

I noticed Torey's contemptuous smile at that. Then I went into detail as much as I could. I told Cobb that I had looked in on Torey, and sat down in the room to watch, and dozed off. I told about my awakening and described Torey's actions completely.

"Humph," growled Cobb.

He quietly went about binding Torey's wound. I noticed that he had spent some time frowning down at the deep cut. Then he examined the bed table and the decanter. He worried over a rough edge he found on the metal frame of the bed table. "Might have done it," he mused half to himself.

My eyes went from Cobb to Torey. The patient seemed expectant. I thought I knew what was coming when he spoke. "Dr. Cobb, can I have some sleeping medicine?"

Cobb grunted and did not answer for a while. Then he turned to me. "What do you think, Dr. Manning?"

"Sure," I said. "I think Mr. Torey has earned that."

We both left the room then and after leaving instructions with the nurse, I accompanied Cobb down to the entrance, where he was about to get into his car and drive home to his cottage near the hospital.

"What do you think, Manning? Is he going insane—or is he insane?"

I shook my head slowly. "I don't think so, Dr. Cobb. It's not as simple as that."

Cobb grunted again. We were outside now. He had one hand on his car door. "You know, Manning, a person doesn't get an injury like that from just nothing. Yet you describe his actions as convulsive before he sustained the injury. He might have injured himself on the point of the bed-table. That's the logical thought. When you weren't looking, of course."

I nodded noncommitally as Cobb got into his car and drove off. Back in my room I pondered. I knew Cobb was worried. I knew he had seen what I had. I knew from the way he had paused over Torey's wound. Paused and stared, just as I had when I first uncovered the cut arm. There is nothing in an immaculately clean hospital room that could make a ragged tear such as we both had seen. Nothing that would leave bits of earth and dirt and rust in that wound.

One thing hit me suddenly as I again stood by my window looking out into that long night. I remembered taking Torey's pulse. He was on his side and I reached for his right hand, bringing it out of the covers to find the pulse. There was no cut then. Yet a few moments later that same right forearm was dreadfully mangled.

This time when I got into bed I had no thoughts of trying to project myself in a "nether land." I was asleep inside of five minutes.

THE next morning I made it a point to drop in on Torey. He looked white, but not too much the worse for wear. His arm wasn't paining him much, he

said. I didn't have too much time to spend but I promised I would come back that afternoon. On my rounds I ran into Cobb.

He hadn't seen Torey. In the cold light of morning I think he felt a bit put out with the whole case.

"Anyway," said Cobb, "this is more in your realm than in mine. I'll take care of his arm but when a chap starts trying to take his life, I'm not the man for the problem."

I could see that Cobb, a tip-top medical man, had become provoked with his own inability to benefit Torey, when there was seemingly nothing the matter. And especially annoyed at last night's episode, for which we, neither of us, had reached a definite conclusion.

Cobb, I could further see, had decided to be adamant.

"I refuse to prescribe any more drugs for that man," he stated. "This drug fixation he has may be the whole trouble and I won't be a party to it."

I asked him what about relatives or friends? Did anybody ever come to see Torey? Cobb impatiently answered that as far as he knew nobody ever came, and no wonder.

As good as my word, that afternoon I dropped into Torey's room. He looked better. I think the poor chap was looking forward to another good night's sleep. I didn't have the heart to warn him that, going by Dr. Cobb's stern attitude in the hall, he wouldn't be getting any more sedatives.

We talked about this and that for longer than I realized. Torey's supper was brought in at six, and it was after that when I began to steer the conversation around to the previous night.

Torey seemed quite willing to talk. I think I had won his confidence and he looked to me to champion his side against Dr. Cobb, not realizing that, after all, I was not in a professional position to do this, even if I so desired.

I asked him to try to describe to me just exactly what he had gone through last night.

Pathetically he asked me not to laugh at him and I assured him that after last night I had no intention of laughing at him at all.

"Go on," I said, leaning back in the chair. "Describe this adventure you had."

"I've told you that it comes on me when I go to sleep. Or as I am about to go to sleep. I lie there and I am awake and then suddenly I am not quite awake. I am in a transitional state. To most of us this is pleasant. It is unreal, a sort of drifting consciousness where we merge gradually into sleep."

"To certain persons this experience is a choice one. There is a quality of romance attached. It has an ethereal quality, that is far from life, yet is not sleep because it is so and not a dream."

I found some of this hard to follow, yet I think I knew what he meant. In psychiatry we recognize there is a twilight zone of consciousness that is not full sleep, yet is not consciousness. At times, it can be induced by a form of hypnosis. . . .

But Torey was continuing . . .

"Like dreams, this in-between land has its compelling realities. My uncle determined that it was an individual equation as to how real these adventures were. He believed that with the proper mental preparation and development these trips into this in-between land could become a reality."

"You mean that your uncle, Allan Forter, thought a person could actually disappear . . . ?" I interrupted incredulously.

Torey smiled. "The whole process is so complex that it is hard to explain. It is so complex that even my uncle did not fully understand what strange abilities he

had tried to develop in himself and succeeded in developing in me. Do you think these things could have happened to us, if, if we had known what hellish . . ." Torey broke off and looked at his arm with desperation.

I WAITED for him to continue, and then when he did not I asked him, "And has your uncle had experiences similar to the one you went through last night?"

Torey in his excitement ignored my question.

"Because they're wicked, don't you see? They're monsters and they resent our intrusion. They are devils and they'll kill us if they can," Torey was excited now. He went on soberly, "My uncle has been scared, too. He knows now just as I do that some day . . . Oh, God." Torey's voice broke off and the man had another fit of sobbing.

"Torey," I said briskly. "I'd like to bring your uncle here. I'd like to talk to him about things. You've given no name of kin on your chart. Don't you think you've kind of held out on us? After all, man, we want to get at the bottom of this, don't we?"

Torey looked at me squarely then. "Never," he said. "That would be the worst thing possible. My uncle can't help me. It would worry him sick if he thought this thing was killing me."

I thought this reasoning was a little weak and told him so.

Torey shook his head defiantly.

"But as a matter of form would you let me know his address. You can trust me, Torey. It's just that I'd like to have it. Suppose I promise not to use it unless you let me . . . or if . . ." I stopped.

Torey knew what was in my mind. He grinned. "You mean, Doctor, in case anything happens to me? That's what you mean. I'll do it on one condition."

"Okay. What's that? Anything reasonable and I'll promise."

"That if anything happens to me, you'll not tell Uncle about this. You'll tell him that I died as a result of the auto accident. You won't tell him one word about what I have told you."

I agreed lightly. Anything happening to Torey, outside of self-inflicted injuries, seemed ridiculous.

Torey said he would have the address in a sealed envelope when I came back that evening. . . . That was all right with me.

When I entered Torey's room that night I walked in on a stormy scene. Dr. Cobb had the center of the floor and I could hear his stern "nos" even before I opened the door. It was the same old story. Torey was pleading for drugs and Cobb was stubbornly refusing.

"And when I leave, please don't give in to this man and prescribe sleeping potions for him," Cobb warned me as he was leaving. I overlooked the remark. Cobb was all right. Only terribly flustered by this case he didn't understand. And I'll confess that I was pretty much in the same boat.

"Well, Torey, it looks as though you'll have to fight this thing out yourself," I said after we were alone.

Torey was silent for a moment and then handed me an envelope he'd had under the sheet. "That's my uncle's address."

He went on, "I'm terribly scared. I'm afraid of the night and of what's going to happen."

"Tell me what these creatures look like," I asked. "Your world, what sort of creatures people it?"

"They're monstrous and misshapen. They're evil and they hate. They are four-legged yet they walk like men. And they carry long, harpoon-like weapons," Torey finished listlessly.

"And your craving for drugs?" I asked.

"How do you figure drugs help? You know, Dr. Cobb, I'm afraid, thinks you're getting yourself into trouble with this craving for opiates. That's a serious disease in itself."

"If Cobb really knew, he'd be sure I was a dope fiend," almost cried Torey. "For months, even before my auto accident, I was afraid to sleep naturally—without drugs."

"For fear you couldn't sleep?" I was naive on purpose.

"For fear I could," answered the patient.

"For fear of what would happen to me when I did. No man knows what worlds impinge on our own in some distorted way. There are many things we none of us understand. The fictional idea of foreign dimensions is always so ludicrously jolly. There is an interchange of trinkets or some such ridiculousness patterned after the first white man seeking an Indian. But in reality, Doctor, perhaps these people in other spheres don't want us. Perhaps they have only the desire to repel an invader. Just as we would if some strange monster dropped out of the sky on this planet. My uncle and I delved into knowledge that should have been left alone. Through it I gained an ability that was unthinkable. But, again unlike fiction, we cannot smash the space machine, we cannot lose this ability; it is with us just as if we developed a muscle. It is with us until death." Torey's eyes were haunted.

Great Lord, the man believed every word he was saying. And even as my scientific mind murmured tommy-rot, I was swayed by his frenzied sincerity.

"But the other night," I bickered, "You went to sleep all right, you had these delusions at least an hour after you first went to sleep. Doesn't that kind of blast your ideas?"

"Don't you see, when I first slip into this devil-land, I hide. They don't find me. It takes them time to realize I'm there. But when they do, they hunt for me ferociously. And I can only try to wake myself up, and you know what an impossible job that is. When I go to sleep normally, I drift into this land. . . ."

I WAVED my hand at him, "I've heard all that, Torey. I'll admit that the accident last night was quite shocking. But there must have been some logical explanation."

"Please, Dr. Manning, don't be out of patience with me. I've tried to tell you the truth about things as best I can. Please, Doctor, don't ask me to face another night without medicine."

"Cobb is right," I spoke out harshly. "You're talking like a trembling coward who's got to have his ration of dope."

"I can't explain it," admitted Torey unhappily. "But isn't it true that a certain type of drug paralyzes certain sections of the brain?"

"I know," I said impatiently, "all that is true."

"Well, don't you see, don't you see that then a portion of my brain is anesthetized . . . and, if that portion is the part that has gotten my uncle and me into trouble. . . ?"

"Mr. Torey, you're talking like an emotional fool," I said, and rose and started to leave the room.

"It isn't I who am the fool, Doctor," Torey said in a sober voice.

I regretted my harshness with him and turned back with a smile.

"Look, Mr. Torey. Try to put these things out of your mind and get some sleep. Suggest to yourself that you will sleep and that you will have dreamless sleep. Suggest to yourself that there is nothing to be afraid of."

Torey smiled wanly as I walked again toward the door. "And you won't give me anything, Doctor?"

"I can't. Don't you see, it's Cobb's orders."

"Well, then, I can't sleep. I'll have to keep myself awake."

I shook my head impatiently. "That's up to you. I'd advise you to try to get over this silly notion." I went out of the room.

Not twenty minutes later I was summoned by a call. When I got to Torey's floor the nurse told me that Torey had tried to stab himself with his drinking glass after first splintering it against the side of the bed. We took all other glassware out of the room then and I even had Miss Foster look through the bed to see there were no secreted fragments or instruments of any sort.

Torey seemed very low then. He again pleaded with me to please give him some sedative. I went out of the room without speaking to him. Out in the hall I decided that I should call Cobb.

My gruff colleague was as stern as ever. Then he hit on an idea. "Manning," he suggested, "You and I know this thing is mental. Give him a couple of sodium chloride capsules and tell him that it's a sleeping medication."

As a general thing I dislike giving "fake" medicine but under the circumstances, it seemed allowable. With as straight a face as I could muster, I administered a couple of sodium chloride capsules to Torey, assuring him that I believed they would be perfectly adequate.

Torey was pathetically grateful and clutched my arm in thanks.

I'm afraid I beat a rather ungraceful retreat from his room after saying a hurried good night. My conscience bothered me a bit, but after leaving instructions with the floor nurse that I was to be called if anything happened, I went to my room.

SOMETIME in the night I woke up as a blood-curdling shriek rang out through the hospital. I was up and half-dressed before my buzzer sounded imperatively. I knew without an extra thought just where I was needed.

When I got to Torey's room, I found an interne and Miss Foster in the room. In the center, half in and half out of bed was Torey. The yellow light seemed dim and unreal as I hurried in. As the young interne turned toward me, his face was a sickly color.

His mouth formed syllables I couldn't hear, and he nodded toward the bed. Without seeing exactly what was wrong I knew instinctively something terrible had happened.

"Get Dr. Cobb on the phone," I ordered Miss Foster crisply. She turned and went almost as though in a dream. I came to the bedside and looked down. Torey was twisted horribly, and through the very middle of him, right clean through—I shuddered involuntarily—was a jagged, torn hole that had been driven through the blanket, the sheet, Torey, and the mattress as though with superhuman strength.

The interne wet his lips finally and spoke. "How could it have happened?"

I shook my head dazedly. Miss Foster came in and said other patients were upset. I dismissed the interne to try and quiet them.

I sat down to try and think. Finally Cobb arrived. He dismissed the interne and Miss Foster and then made a silent and minute examination of the body and of the room.

Finally he turned a white, strained face to me. "It is as though somebody did drive a spear clean through him . . . and then pulled it out. Anybody in here?"

I shook my head. "No, Miss Foster says she heard the scream. . . ."

Cobb looked the room over again. Then he turned to me and his face was bleak. "Manning, you looked at this wound?" He barely noted my nod and went on. "We know nobody could have crept in here and

harpooned Torey without being seen even if somebody wanted to. . . ."

I nodded again.

"How could this have happened?"

I shook my head. "I don't know."

Cobb took a breath, "I know what you're thinking . . . about Torey's strange ideas and stories, but it can't be, I tell you. The wound was self-inflicted, somehow. It must have been. Nobody was in this room."

I looked up, "Doctor, you noticed the same characteristics this time as last night? The dirt, the earth and rust in the wound?"

Cobb nodded. "But these things are insanity to ponder over. It is possible that he tried to get out of bed and fell against this chair. Let us say he had somehow overturned the chair, the leg could have gone right through him." Cobb looked at me pathetically, almost hopefully.

"Anyway," he went on, "there is to be no talk about this. We did all we could. Our consciences are clear. I shall announce that he met death as the result of an accident caused by an epileptic convulsion."

I nodded numbly. What else was there to do.

It is amazing how easy it is to substitute a fictitious but logical explanation for a truthful but impossible one. Dr. Cobb told the interne and Miss Foster just what our conclusions were. After all Miss Foster had found Torey in a strange position half in and half out of bed. He *could* have upset the chair close to the bed while moving around in his sleep, then fallen onto it. The tears in the bed itself were—hushed up.

THE next day I remembered the envelope Torey had given me. I found Mr. Forter lived in a town not more than a few hundred miles away from Belvedere Hospital. I sent an urgent telegram requesting him to come and telling him of his nephew's death.

Allan Forter arrived the following afternoon of a black, rainy day. I met him downstairs. Forte was an unprepossessing little man; thin and worn-looking with worry and fatigue etched on his face. I introduced him to Cobb. He shook his head sadly as we explained the details. He seemed genuinely fond of his nephew.

After Cobb had left us Forter turned to me, "Tell me, Doctor. Did you ever notice anything strange about George? He was, shall I say, a rather nervous young man." I noted the anxiety in Forter's voice.

I shook my head slowly. "No. He was an intelligent chap and we all thought he was coming along well. But after these bad smash-ups—sometimes you can't always tell."

"I'm sorry my nephew never sent for me when this happened," said Forter. As he spoke he lifted his hand to scratch his head wistfully. "I would like to have been with him."

As we walked downstairs, Forter thanked me for my services and added that he would make all arrangements.

"Dr. Cobb said you were a psychiatrist, I believe," Forter said.

I explained hastily, "We thought Mr. Torey was pretty unnerved by his auto accident. He needed a bit of help along those lines. I'm terribly sorry we weren't able to pull him through."

Forter nodded thoughtfully, "He never spoke strangely to you, Doctor?"

"No," I lied nobly, "Strangely, in what way?"

We were now at the hospital entrance. "Oh, nothing," laughed Forter and I could see he seemed relieved. "I guess I'm the one to need a psychiatrist."

"What's your trouble," I said casually in the conventional attempt at lightness.

Forter was outside now, a small, frail figure against a backdrop of rain and darkness. His face was drawn and weary.

"My trouble," he half-mused, "Why, I can't sleep."

By ALICE-MARY SCHNIRRING

Lost

Her dreams were nightmares and through them threaded the little voice of a child lost in the darkness.

ONE or two stars, tiny and remote, appeared silently in the high, pale green sky that arched infinitely over the level marshes, stretching as far as the eye could see until marsh and sky met and fused with a silver thread that was the Atlantic on the horizon. A belated gull wheeled in the still twilight, and once cried harshly. The stiff grasses whispered tentatively and then were silent, as the first movement of the sunset breeze gently reminded them that darkness, the enveloping darkness of the blacked-out Atlantic coast, was imminent.

The artist had put down her brushes a good half-hour since; now, with a sigh, she

stirred, shook herself impatiently and briskly, and with an almost cheerful alacrity made an untidy bundle of her easel, brushes and camp stool. Carefully carrying her still damp canvas, and clutching the impossible bundle, she began to pick her way homeward across the marsh.

Suddenly, with an exclamation, she stopped short; then, dropping the bundle and canvas with equal disregard, she bent over a little huddled figure on the damp ground.

It was a little girl, soaking wet and shivering. Her little bare feet were blue with cold; over a torn cotton nightgown, small blue hands clutched a blanket, sodden with sea-water, to the scrawny little breast. With a wordless cry of pity, the artist dropped to her knees beside the child, who, in complete silence, regarded her with enormous blue eyes set in a white, pinched face.

"You poor little lamb," crooned the girl, half-sobbing, as with an infinitely quick and graceful swoop she gathered the pathetic little wet huddle into her arms and rocked it there. "How did you get here, darling? What are your people thinking of—or—?"

A tiny thread of voice came from the blue lips. "Is it all right to talk now?" it said. "*They* won't hear us?"

"Nobody will hear you but Marion, darling," she murmured, kissing the cold little face. "Marion will take care of you; there's nothing to be frightened about now."

"I'm cold," said the little voice; not complainingly, but as one who states a rather uninteresting fact.

"We're going to get you all nice and warm, right away," said Marion, firmly; and, cradling the child in her arms, set off without delay across the darkening marshes to her cottage. Forgotten, her painters' toys lay unregarded in the grass behind her.

A HOT bath, old woolly pajamas of Marion's (ludicrously rolled up in the arms and legs), and a bowl of soup stopped the shivering. At least, the child was no longer shivering, but Marion was—inside—at the appalling emaciation that the hot bath had revealed. Although she was emotional, Marion had plenty of commonsense; and, except for a gentle question that had elicited the baby's name—Moira—she had kept up a cheerful, soothing monologue that comforted the little thing and made no demands on her. Tucked up in Marion's bed, her fawn-brown hair lying like floss on the pillow, Moira turned her head and gravely regarded her. Then, suddenly—her first change of expression—she threw Marion a fleeting, enchanting smile. It was gone almost as soon as it had come, but it transformed the pointed little face, lending it the illusion of baby-rounded cheeks and unshadowed eyes; and it wrenched at Marion's heart like a clawing hand.

"How did you get out on the marsh, darling lamb?" Marion asked softly, bending over the little form almost lost in the bed.

Moira's mouth drooped; her eyes stared hopelessly at the girl, as if searching in darkness, as she whispered, "I was lost—looking for the others."

An alarm bell sounded in Marion's mind. "What others, Moira, baby? Your mommy and daddy?"

The little head moved in negation on the pillow. "The others—like me—the children. Tommy, and Derek—and Betsy. . . ."

"Were they on the marsh with you, darling?" Marion, for a frantic second, thought with horror of other children in the black night, lost on the marsh; but the baby's next words removed that fear, to replace it with a more dreadful one.

"No—in the boat. Tommy—Tommy took care of me. I want Tommy! I want him *now!*" and to Marion's utter consterna-

tion, big tears rolled down the little face; tears that were the more appalling because there was no accompaniment of sobs.

She had recourse again to the ancient comfort of cradling arms, and as she crooned and babbled reassurances the veined eyelids fell at last over the tear-dark eyes, and the last tears dried on the pitiful sunken little cheeks. Marion kissed the child, and put her gently down on the bed, and covered her up to the chin; noting, with a pang, how cold the cheek still felt to her touch.

Toward morning, Marion herself fell into a restless sleep, twisted uncomfortably in the armchair beside the old-fashioned oil stove.

Her dreams were nightmares; and through them threaded the little wailing voice of a child lost in the darkness. In the chilly hour before dawn, she woke with a start. In her ears echoed a little voice, saying, in a cry of pure delight, "Tommy!" and, completely awake in a second, she turned toward the bed, a smile forming on her lips.

And the bed was empty.

All that day, long after darkness had made mockery of her search, she roamed the salt marshes, mile on mile, calling Moira by name; crying little loving names to the endless undulations of the marsh-grasses, until her voice was only a whisper. At last, stumbling with exhaustion, she went home, and a drugged sleep took her thoughts and twisted them into formless horrors. She woke finally, feeling bruised and leaden; noted without interest that the stove was cold and the oil tin empty, and wearily realized that she would have to go to the village for more. She met no one on the road to the village; an unusual thing, but it made no impression on her apathy. Once, she stopped, and was about to turn back to the marshes; then the thought struck her that if she found Moira—no, no; *when* she found Moira—she would need oil to cook with, and to warm the cottage; so she hurried on again, stumbling in her haste.

AT THE outskirts of the village, it did impinge on her consciousness that the streets were unusually deserted; but she brushed aside the faint stirring of curiosity, and went on, breaking into a clumsy run occasionally. Her objective was the wharf, where Mr. Elkins' General Store sold milk, bread, dry goods and oil—oil for the stove to warm Moira, oil to warm chicken broth for Moira.

As she neared the wharf, the explanation of the deserted village became obvious, had she cared. The whole population of Fleetport was clustered like a swarm of bees on the wharf, and an ominous sound, wordless and menacing, rose from them, as they pressed close around something hidden from Marion's sight.

The alarm bell rang again in her clouded mind; loudly, warningly. Acting on an impulse which, not then nor ever after, could she explain, she silently and fiercely pushed a way through the crowd, until, at the water's edge, she stopped short.

Rising and falling gently on the quiet rock of the tide was a battered, sea-scarred lifeboat. In it, like little worn-out toys, were four small bodies. They looked like very young dead birds; poor little mouths open, yellowed skin stretched taut on tiny bones. Two of them lay in the bottom of the boat, covered with a tattered sailor's peajacket; and in the bow, heads pillowed on a life-preserver, a little brown-haired baby girl lay in the arms of a little boy, about eight years old.

Betsy and Derek, Tommy . . . and Moira.

Can you oppose the forces that see that people die just when they are supposed to die—not too soon, not too late?

The Scythe

By RAY BRADBURY

QUITE suddenly there was no more road. It ran down the valley like any other road, between slopes of barren stony ground and live oak trees, and then past a broad field of wheat standing alone in the wilderness. It came up beside

the small white house that belonged to the wheat field and then just faded out, as though there was no more use for it.

It didn't matter much, because just there the last of the gas was gone. Tom Joerg braked the ancient car to a stop and sat there, not speaking, staring at his big rough farmer's hands.

Molly said, without moving where she lay in the corner beside him, "We must of took the wrong fork back yonder."

Joerg nodded.

Molly's lips were almost as white as her face. Only they were dry where her skin was damp with sweat. Her voice was flat, with no expression in it.

"Tom," she said. "Tom, what are we a-goin' to do now?"

Joerg stared at his hands. A farmer's hands, with the farm blown out from under them by the dry hungry wind that never got enough good loam to eat.

The kids in the back seat woke up and pried themselves out of the dusty litter of bundles and bedding. They poked their heads over the back of the seat and said:

"What are we stoppin' for, Pa? Can we eat now, Pa? Pa, we're awful hungry. Are we gonna eat now, Pa?"

Joerg closed his eyes. He hated the sight of his hands.

Molly's fingers touched his wrist. Very light, very soft. "Tom—maybe in the house there they'd spare us somethin' to eat?"

A white line showed around Joerg's mouth. "Beggin'!" he said harshly. "Ain't no Joerg ever begged before. Ain't no Joerg ever goin' to."

Molly's hand tightened on his wrist. He turned and saw her eyes. He saw the eyes of Susie and little Tom, looking at him.

Slowly all the stiffness went out of his neck and his back. His face got loose and blank, shapeless like a thing that has been beaten too hard and too long. He got out of the car and went up the path to the house. He walked uncertainly, like a man who is sick, or nearly blind.

The door of the house was open. Joerg knocked three times. There was nothing inside but silence, and a white window curtain moving in the slow, hot air.

Joerg knew it before he went in. He knew there was death in the house. It was that kind of a silence.

He went through a small clean living room and down a little hall. He wasn't thinking anything. He was past thinking. He was going toward the kitchen, unquestioning, like an animal.

Then he looked through an open door and saw the dead man.

HE WAS an old man, lying out on a clean white bed. He hadn't been dead long; not long enough to lose the last quiet look of peace. He must have known he was going to die, because he wore his grave clothes—an old black suit, brushed and neat, and a clean white shirt and a black tie.

A scythe leaned against the wall beside the bed. Between the old man's hands there was a blade of wheat, still fresh. A ripe blade, golden and heavy in the tassel.

Joerg went into the bedroom, walking soft. There was a coldness on him. He took off his broken, dusty hat and stood by the bed, looking down.

The paper lay open on the pillow beside the old man's head. It was meant to be read. Maybe a request for burial, or to call a relative. Joerg scowled over the words, moving his pale, dry lips.

"To him who stands beside me at my death bed: Being of sound mind, and alone in the world as it has been decreed, I, John Buhr, do give and bequeath this farm, with all pertaining to it, to the man who is to come. Whatever his name or origin shall be, it will not matter. The farm is his, and the wheat; the scythe, and the task ordained thereto. Let him take them, freely, and

without question—and remember that I, John Buhr, am only the giver, not the ordainer. To which I set my hand and seal this third day of April, 1939. (Signed) John Buhr. Kyrie eleison!"

Joerg walked back through the house and opened the screen door. He said, "Molly, you come in. Kids, you stay in the car."

Molly came inside. He took her to the bedroom. She looked at the will, the scythe, the wheat-field moving in a hot wind outside the window. The white face tightened up and she bit her lips and held on to him. "Tom, it's too good to be true. There must be some trick in it."

Joerg said, "Our luck's changin', that's all. We'll have work to do, stuff to eat, something over our head to keep rain off." He touched the scythe. It gleamed like a half moon. Words were scratched on its metal blade: *"Who wields me—wields the world."* It didn't mean much to him, right at that moment.

"Tom," Molly asked, staring at the old man's clasped hands. "Tom—why's he holdin' that wheat-stalk so hard in his fingers?"

Just then the heavy silence was broken by the sound of the kids scrambling up the front porch. Molly gasped.

THOUGH it was a mite unusual, circumstances being what they were connecting to the old man, the Joerg family set up living in the house, buried the old-timer on a far hill and it looked kind of like things would be peaceable a bit.

Leastways it would have been, save for the wheat-field and the scythe. Joerg roused himself at first gray smell of dawn and was out reaping grain each morn, forgetting to point out to Molly how unusual the field was. How it was too big for one man to tend, and yet one man had tended it. How it ripened only in separate clusters, each set off far from others. And, most important how when he cut the wheat it rotted within a few hours, and the next day dug in and come up with roots with green sprouts, born again.

Joerg rubbed his stubbled chin, worried a little, wondered what and why and how it acted that way. A couple of times he walked up to the grave on the far hill just to be sure the old man was there, maybe with some notion he might get an idea there about the field. But the grave was in the sun and wind and silence. The old man said nothing; there were a lot of stones and dirt in his face, now. So that didn't solve anything. So Joerg went back to reaping, enjoying it because it seemed important. Very important. He didn't know why, but it was. Very, very important.

He couldn't just let the wheat stand. There were always new patches of it ripened over the three mile stretch to the mountains and Joerg observed to no one particularly: "I figured it. If I cut wheat for the next ten year, just as it ripes up, I don't think I'd come by the same spot twice in that time. Such a damn big field."

And, shaking his long, bony face, he added to himself: "The wheat ripens just *so*. Never too much of it that I can't cut ALL the ripe stuff each day. That leaves nothin' but green grain. And next mornin', sure enough, another ripe crop. Funniest danged thing—"

But, come to think of it, it was damn silly, him cutting grain that began rotting as quick as it fell. So one day he decided to let it go a couple of days.

JOERG lay in bed late, just listening to the silence in the house that wasn't anything like death silence, but a silence of things living well and happily.

He got up and forced himself to eat breakfast, nervously. He wasn't going to work today. He went out to milk the cow, forgot what he had gone out for, came back

and asked Molly. She told him. "Oh, yeah," he said, and went out again. He found the cow, milked it, but thought about other things. The wheat. The scythe.

The sun got in his head, wouldn't leave. It burned there, with a hot, blinding pain. His appetite vanished. He sweated. Under his arms, down his back, splotches of perspiration soaked through his denim shirt.

His fingers itched. He couldn't sit still. His head ached. His eyes stung. His stomach was sick. He couldn't sit still. . . .

At one o'clock he was a caged animal, pacing in and out of the house, concentrating momentarily on digging an irrigation ditch but all the time thinking about —the scythe—the wheat.

"Damn!" He strode in to the bedroom, took the scythe down from its wall-pegs. His stomach steadied itself. His headache ran away. He felt cool, calm, his fingers didn't itch.

It was instinct. Pure, illogical instinct. Each day the grain must be cut. It HAD to be cut. It *had* to be. Why? Well, it just DID, that's all. Madness. Insanity. Heck, it was just an ordinary wheat-field. *Like hell!*

Each day came, lingered, and loped away like a gentle horse. Weeks strolled by in herds. Joerg thought more and more of his work as a sort of dry ache and hunger.

Things were building up in his brain, though. One day Susie and Tom giggled and played with the scythe while Joerg was quietly, slowly eating bread-milk in the kitchen. Joerg heard them. He went out and took it away from them, the muscles in his cheeks lined up taut like violin strings tuned to bust. White bone showed under his knuckle-skin. He didn't yell at them. He just glared, and locked the scythe up after that when it wasn't being used.

He never missed a day, scything. He fed his work-hunger. Up. Down. Up. Down. Cutting. Up. Down.

Up.

Think about the old man and the wheat in his hands when he died.

Down.

Think about this dead barren land with wheat living on it.

Up.

Think about crazy patterns of wheat, the way it grows!

Down.

Think about!

The wheat whipped around, yellow water in a full tide about his ankles. With an instant flourish of ink the sky went black. It got in Joerg's eyes. His mind felt like it had been kicked by a logger's boot. He reeled.

Suddenly, he cried, "I've—I've killed somebody! I've killed a lot—"

The sky revolved like a blue merry-go-round at the county fair in Kansas. But no music.

Only a ringing in his ears.

Molly was sitting at the blue kitchen table, peeling potatoes when he blundered into the kitchen, the scythe still clutched in his hands. She swam around in the wet of his eyes.

"Molly! Molly! I been—" he shivered.

She waited. He finally got it out. "Molly, we got to move away from here. That old man, know what he was doing here? That wheat! This scythe! Every time I use it, every time I cut grain a thousand people die."

Molly got up, quick, dropping her knife.

Joerg went on: "That's how it is! I know! I heard voices in the grain now—sad voices—telling me to stop, telling me not to kill them!"

"Tom!"

He didn't hear her. "That's what's wrong with the field. The nasty way it grows crooked, wild like a idiot, that's it—"

She stared at him. Her eyes were blue glass. Nothing else.

He stopped, put his hand to his mouth. "You don't believe me. You think I'm crazy. But wait— Oh, God, Molly, I just killed my mother! I just—"

"Tom Joerg, you stop!"

"I did it by cutting down the stalk of wheat that was her! I killed her. I felt her dying. That's how I found out—"

"Tom Joerg!" Molly's voice cracked like a hand across his face. Angry and afraid together. "Tom Joerg, shut up! *Shut up!*"

He mumbled. "Oh, Molly. . . ."

HIS hands opened. The scythe slipped and clamored on the floor. Molly picked it up with a snap of anger. She set it hard in a corner, glaring at Joerg. "Ten years," she said, "I been with you. You gone through dust and heat and havin' nothin' but prayers and water in your mouth. And now—when your luck's changed—you can't bear up under it. You get crazy ideas about—"

Joerg didn't try to speak. He just swayed.

Molly hurried into the living room. The Bible was in her small worn hands when she returned. "Now you set down, Tom Joerg, and you listen while I read. Set down!"

She rustled the pages open. It sounded just like wheat rustling in a small, slow wind. Joerg trembled. Molly lifted the Bible, read black words on a white page, looking up from time to time to see what was happening to Tom's face.

A sound came in from the sunshine. A small incongruous sound at a moment like this. The kids, laughing in the shade of a large live oak.

Molly kept reading.

That was on Tuesday. Molly read from the Bible each evening after that. Until the following Wednesday, a week later, when Joerg walked down to a distant town to see if there was any mail at General Delivery.

There was a letter.

Joerg came home looking two hundred years older, walking blind and unsteady. He held the letter out to Molly and quoted its contents to her in a strange voice:

"—your mother passed away at one o'clock Tuesday afternoon. Her heart—"

JOERG didn't cry. All he said was, "Get the kids in the car, load it up with our belongin's. We're goin' on to California. We're not stayin' here a day longer. . . ."

"Tom, what makes you think this way?"

"I feel it. I know it. I ain't told you, but that wheat ain't healthy. You know yourself this ain't decent land for grain. Yet here it is! And it ripens in patches, a little bit each day. That ain't right. And as soon as I cut it—it rots! And next morning, without any help, its taken root, startin' to grow again.

"Last Tuesday I felt it strong, like liquor runnin' through me. And when I cut one wheat-swathe it was like rippin' my own flesh! I heard somebody scream. Sounded just like—my mother. And now—today—this letter."

Joerg shifted uneasily in his chair. feeling sucked clean and full of hot fire.

Mollie's fingers tightened around the letter, hard.

"We're not going to California, Tom. We're stayin' on here, no matter what."

"Molly . . ."

"We're stayin' on here. Where we're sure of eatin' and sleepin', where we're sure of livin' decent and livin' long. Look here, Tom, I'm not raisin' my children like skin and bones again!"

The sky was blue through the windows, the sun slanted in, touching half of Molly's very calm face, shining one eye bright blue. Four or five water drops poised, pearled

and fell from the faucet slowly, shining, before Joerg sighed. The sigh was husky and resigned. He nodded, eyes closed. "All right, Molly. You're right, I guess. We—we'll stay."

He picked up the scythe. The words on the metal leaped at him with a sharp glitter. WHO WIELDS ME—WIELDS THE WORLD!

"We'll stay. . . ."

NEXT morning he walked to the old man's grave. There was a single fresh sprout of wheat growing in the center of it. The same sprout, reborn, that the old man had held in his hands weeks before.

He talked to the old man, getting no answers, but still talking. "You knew you were going to die. You worked the field for all your life because you *had* to, and one day you came across your own life growing there. You knew it was yours. You cut it. And you went home, put on your grave clothes, and your heart gave out and you died. That's how it was, wasn't it? And you passed the land on to me, and when I die, I'm supposed to hand it over to someone else."

Joerg's voice held awe in it. "How long a time has this been goin' on? With nobody knowin' about this field and its use except the men with the scythe . . . ?"

Quite suddenly Joerg felt very old. The valley seemed ancient, mummified, secretive, dried and bent and powerful. When the Indians danced on the prairie it had been here. The same sky, the same wind, the same wheat. And before the Indians? Some Cro-Magnon, gnarled and shaghaired, wielding a crude wooden scythe, perhaps, prowling down through the living wheat. . . .

Joerg returned to work. Up, down. Up, down. Obsessed with the idea of being the Grim Reaper. He, himself. Tom Joerg! It burst upon him in a mad, wild surge of strength and horror.

Up! WHO WIELDS ME— Down! WIELDS THE WORLD!

What power for a simple Kansan farmer!

He began accepting the job with some sort of makeshift philosophy. It was simply his way of getting food, lodging for his family. They deserved eating, living decent after all these years.

Up, down. Each grain a life, a smile he cut in half. And, he realized suddenly, if he planned it carefully, thought about it enough, why, why he and Mollie and Tom and Susie could live forever.

If he could find the place where the grain grew that represented himself and Molly and the kids—they could be immortal. He would never cut it!

Just then, as if at a signal, it hit him.

Mollie, Tom and Susie. Right there at his feet. Their wheat! Their grain. Their symbols! One more stroke of his scythe and he'd slice them away and they'd be dead!

Mollie, Tom, Susie! He was certain of it. He was positive. Trembling, he knelt down and looked at the three strands of life. The energy of them struck at him.

It wasn't fair. So soon after he had been forced to kill his mother. And now, on the heels of it all, after ages of unfair starvation and sweating and praying, this was his reward.

He had to kill Molly and young Tom and his sister.

He didn't. He grabbed the scythe and ran back to the house.

Molly thought it was awfully strange when he came in, kissed her on the cheek, giving no reason for it at all.

OVER his dinner of pork and white bread and cool milk he worried quietly, watching the kids running around the yard.

Molly said, "You quit work early today, Tom." She poked unconsciously at pork

sizzling in the pan. "Does—does the wheat still rot when it falls?"

Tom nodded. She dished him more pork. "Keep tryin'. Some day it'll be healthy. Write to the Agricultural Bureau, have them come look at it—"

"No."

"Don't act that way. I just suggested, that's all."

Tom's eyes dilated. "I got to stay here all my life. Can't nobody else mess with the wheat, they wouldn't know where to cut. They might cut the wrong parts."

"What wrong parts?"

"Nothing." He chewed slowly. "Nothin' at all."

"Tom, the Government men'd be the best thing for that wheat."

Joerg pushed his plate aside, quick, put his fork down. "Why, who knows *what* they might want to do. They might even —might even want to plow the whole field under!"

Molly nodded. "That's what it needs," she said. "And start all over again with new seed!"

Joerg stood up and went to the door. "You still don't believe what I said about the scythe, do you?"

She ate. "No, Tom, I don't. And please don't talk about it."

Tom pushed the kitchen door open. "I'm not writin' any government, and I'm not handin' over the cuttin' of this field to no stranger, ever."

NO MATTER how he felt about killing his wife and children, he couldn't neglect what was left of the wheat. People had to die. That was his job, making sure they did. He detoured around that place where Mollie and Tom and Susie's wheat-grains grew up in the sun, and started using his scythe on the far end of the field where he knew he wouldn't cut them by mistake.

He didn't like it. By the time an hour had passed he had been responsible for the death of six of his old, loved friends. Joe Spangeler, William March, Lars Johnson and others all back in Kansas. Instinctively, he read their names and lives in the cut dead wheat.

It was then that Joerg couldn't take it any longer. He brought the scythe back to the house, locked it in the cellar and threw the key away. He was done being the Grim Reaper. Done for good and all!

That evening he sat on the front porch, smoking his pipe, telling the kids stories so he could hear them laugh. But they didn't laugh much. They seemed quiet, tired and funny, like they weren't his children any more. Funny.

Molly complained of a headache, dragged around the house a little, and went to bed early and fell into a deep sleep. That was funny, too. Molly always stayed up late and was full of vinegar.

The wheat field tugged at him like a strong magnet. It wanted cutting. It didn't like being neglected until tomorrow. Certain stalks, certain lives, required reaping *now!* Joerg swallowed quietly.

Moonlight rippled over the wheat like a silver sea.

What would happen to the world if he never went into the field again to carry out his ordained job? What would happen to people who were ripe for death, and waiting for the scythe?

He would wait and see. He would sleep on it.

Molly was breathing softly when he blew out the oil lamps and went to bed. But he couldn't sleep. He kept hearing the wind in the wheat, and feeling the hunger in his arms to do his work. The grain called to him.

In the middle of the night he found himself walking in the field, with the scythe in his hands. Walking like an automaton, crazy with fear, drugged with terror, but walking and walking. He didn't remember unlocking the cellar door, get-

ting the scythe, but here he was awake in the moonlight, walking in the grain.

Among these grains there were many who were old, weary, wanting so very much to sleep. They pleaded with him in small, silent voices. Sleep—give us sleep! The long, quiet, moonlit sleep.

The urge of the scythe was insane and incredible. It held onto his hands, grew there, forcing him to walk.

Somehow he managed to get free of it, throw it down and run away from it, around a small hill, where he stopped and went down on his knees. "I don't want to kill any more. Please. I don't want Molly dead, and the kids. If I work with the Scythe again I'll have to kill them. Please. Don't ask me to do it!"

But the stars only blinked in the indigo sky. That was all the light there was, because the moon had just gone down.

And Joerg heard the explosion.

SOMETHING came up over the rim of the hill into the sky. Like a living creature it danced, throwing out arms of flame, licking the stars. Sparks fell like hot rain into Joerg's face. The thick hot odor of fire came with it. It happened instantly.

The house!

Joerg cried out and couldn't hear himself for the way his heart kicked his insides out. He forgot how to run and had to learn all over again, looking at the fire.

The little white house with the live oaks fronting it, and the iron pump in back of it. It was roaring up in one savage thrust of flame. A heat-tide rolled over the hill and Joerg swam in it, drowning over his head.

The house looked like a new-born sun, not a shingle, bolt or threshold in it was not alive with flame. It made noises. Blistering, crackling fumbling noises.

Joerg yelled it: "Molly! Susie! Tom!"

We wondered why he bothered yelling. Before he got near the house he knew he wouldn't get an answer. He didn't.

He got as close to it as possible. So close that his eyebrows stung, withered; his skin crawled hot like paper burning, crisping, curling up in little tight curls.

"Molly! Tom!"

The only answer he got was a rent crumbling when the roof fell in. Brilliant skirts of sparks were tossed out by it.

The fire settled down contentedly to feed. Joerg ran around the house a dozen times, all alone. Then he sat down where the fire toasted his body and waited. Waited until all the walls had sunken down with fluttering crashes, until the ceilings bent, blanketing the floor with molten plaster and scorched lathing. Until the flame died and smoke coughed up skyward and the dawn was coming slowly and there was nothing but embering ashes, smouldering.

Disregarding the intense heat-drive fanning from the leveled frames, Joerg walked into the center of the ruin. It was still too dark to see much. Red light glowed on his sweating throat.

Here—the kitchen. Charred, and disassembled tables, chairs, the iron stove, the cupboards.

Here—the hall. And here the parlor and here the bedroom where—

Where Molly was still alive.

Where Molly Joerg now lay sleeping among angry embers, sleeping pleasantly as if nothing had happened. Her small white hands at her side, flaked with hot sparks. Her calm face slumbering with a flaming lath across one cheek.

Joerg staggered. She was actually lying there in the remnants of her smoking bedroom, lying on a bed of glittering sparks, her skin perfectly intact, her breast rising, falling, taking air.

"Molly!"

Alive and sleeping after the fire, after the walls had roared down, after ceilings

had collapsed upon her and flame stepped upon her. Joerg shuddered.

The soles of his shoes smoked as he pushed through piles of smoking lath toward Molly. It might have seared his feet off the ankles, but he wouldn't have felt it. He kneeled down in it. "Molly."

SHE didn't move. She didn't hear. She didn't speak. She wasn't dead. She wasn't alive. She just lay there with the fire surrounding her and not touching her, not harming her in any way. Her cotton nightgown was streaked with ashes, but not burnt. Her brown hair spread on a pillow of red-hot coals.

Joerg touched her cheek. It was cold. Cold in the middle of hell. Tiny breaths trembled her half-smiling lips.

"Molly, what's wrong? How did you . . . ?"

Joerg suddenly was aware of a sick stomach and a heart beating like a battered kettle-drum. He was plain scared, all through.

Susie and little Tom were there, too. Behind a smoke-veil he made out two smaller figures huddled in the middle of a blanket of crisped plaster, sleeping.

He carried Molly out of the ruins like she was a kid. And then he went back and brought out the quiet forms that were Susie and young Tom. He laid them on the edge of the wheat field and tried to get them to wake up. Nothing happened.

"Molly, wake up. Time to get up. Another day, Molly."

Her breasts moved up and moved down.

"Kids! Tom, Susie—wake up! Your mother is—"

He trembled over the word. Dead? No, not dead. But—

He shook the kids, but they were too busy sleeping. He straightened up, his face all white, deep cut lines. He *knew*.

He knew why they slept through the fire and continued to sleep now. He knew why Molly just lay there, never wanting to laugh again.

The power of the Wheat and the Scythe.

Their lives, scheduled to end yesterday, May 30, 1939, had been prolonged simply because he refused to cut the grain. By waiting, he had hoped to prevent their deaths. He thought he could make them immortal. They *should* have died in the fire. That's the way Fate wrote it. But since he had not reaped their grain, nothing could hurt them. A house had flamed and crumpled and still they lived. But there was nothing for them to do. They were caught halfway, not dead, not alive. Simply—waiting.

And all over the world thousands more just like them, victims of accidents, fires, disease, waiting, sleeping just like Molly and the kids. Not able to die, not able to live. All because he was afraid to cut the grain. All because he thought he could trick Fate.

He closed his eyes tight, cursed. The job had to be done every day. With never a stop, never a pause forever and forever and forever.

All right! By God, he'd show them! He'd *cut* the grain!

He didn't say good-by to his family. He found the scythe and ran up into the field, feeling the hunger of it strike up through his arms, a hunger that he nursed now with insane anger! Wheat whipped against his legs like flails. He pounded through it, shouting. He stopped.

"Molly!" he cried, and raised the blade and brought it down. Down, hard. Cutting wheat.

"Children!" he cried again, and raised the blade and brought it down again.

Somebody screamed. It sounded like three people. Joerg didn't turn around.

AND then sobbing wildly, with a fierce unrelenting insanity of vengeance against Fate in every muscle, he rose above

the grain again and again and hewed to left and to right and to left and to right and to left and to right. Over and over and over! Slicing out huge scars in green wheat and ripe wheat. With no selection and no care, cursing, over and over, swearing, laughing laughter that was not his own any more. The blade swung up in the rising sun and came down in the sun, singing and whistling.

Hitler marched into Austria.

The blade swung insanely.

Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia.

The blade sang crimson wet.

Poland fell.

The grain leaped up, green, falling left and right.

Bombs hurtled down, shattering London, shattering Moscow.

And the blade went on rising, crashing, scarring with the hot fury of a man who has fought and lost his loved ones and does not know or care what he does to the world.

Just a few short miles off the Main Highway, down a rough dirt road that leads to nowhere, just a few short miles from the highway jammed with California-bound traffic.

Once in a while during the long years a jalopy gets off the main highway, pulls up steaming in front of the charred ruin of a little white house at the end of the dirt road, to ask instructions from a farmer who works insanely, unendingly, wildly, without ever stopping, night and day in the wheat field there.

But they get no help, no answer. The farmer in the field is too busy, even after all these years, too busy hewing and chopping the green wheat instead of the ripe wheat.

And Tom Joerg moves on with his scythe. With that hot mad light in his eyes. On and on and on. . . .

Strange Music

By DOROTHY QUICK

I ONCE heard elfin music
When the moon was low;
And I saw elfin shadows
Dancing to and fro.

Since then no other music
Can quicken my heart's beat
And never comes a rhythm
That tempts my dancing feet.

I once heard elfin music
When the moon was low
So now I hear that music
Wherever I may go.

Return of the Undead

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE and FRANK BELKNAP LONG

The Grave Robbers

TERENCE O'ROURKE was frightened. There was a strained horror in his gaze as he stood staring down at old Simeon Hodges lying still and pale in his coffin.

The tall young man beside him was grinning derisively. "What's the matter, Terry? Scared of your own shadow?"

It takes some sense of humor to laugh off a dead man who's come all the way from the cemetery just to see you.

O'Rourke drew in his breath sharply. I can't understand it," he muttered. "He's been dead nearly a month, but he—he still looks *spruced up!*"

Marvin Cummings shifted his spade and spat down into the empty grave. "Pull yourself together, Terry," he gibed. "He's been shot full of arsenic. You ought to know that a well-preserved corpse can take it."

Harsh laughter came from both sides of him. O'Rourke's three companions were trying hard to be hard. Tall, blue-eyed M. T. (Empty) Cummings, his straw-colored hair blowing in the night wind. Little John Slater, his shoulders hunched and his hands thrust deep into his pockets —to hide their trembling. Lanky, freckled-faced Clarence Limerick, looking even younger than his nineteen years.

ONLY O'Rourke wasn't pretending. "All right," he muttered. "Laugh your heads off. Digging that poor old fellow up and robbing him of the peace he's entitled to isn't *my* idea of a joke."

"The joke won't be on him," said Cummings, ghoulishly. "His sense of humor has atrophied—along with his heart, lungs and liver."

"That's right," said little Slater. "The joke will be on Freddy. He'll hit the ceiling when he sees a corpse in his bed."

"It's a mean, malicious trick," said O'Rourke. "I'm ashamed of myself. We're grave robbers. We're worse than—"

"Aw, stow it, Terry," rapped Limerick. "You weren't so thin-skinned this morning. You agreed with us that Freddy needed hardening. He's so damned nervous and excitable that a dead fly on his undershirt would scare the pants off him."

"Yeah, something has got to be done about Freddy," agreed Cummings. "If he wants to be a sawbones he'll have to stop yelling for his mama every time he sees a calvaria chisseled off, and a nice, juicy brain exposed. It's a wonder Nancy has any respect for him."

"That's what gets me down," grunted Limerick. "He faints in the dissecting room and what happens? She goes out with him on a date. With nail-hard material to choose from why did she have to go soft on a weak-kneed Freshman squirt?"

"Oh, Freddy's all right," grunted Cummings, charitably. "All he needs is a jolt. We're doing everything possible for the lad. Digging up Hodges is no crime because the old fellow was a nonentity plus."

"We couldn't have picked a lonelier corpse," chimed in Slater. "He lived like an animal, alone in the woods. There'll be no mourners coming to *his* grave."

"Yeah, that's the beauty of it," agreed Limerick. "When we put him back no one will be the wiser—except Freddy."

O'Rourke scarcely heard him. He was staring at Cummings as though unable to believe his eyes. Cummings had ceased to grin. The revulsion in his mind had at last undermined his bravado. His face was twitching and he was staring down at the dead man as though transfixed.

It wasn't to be wondered at, really. The yawning grave, the smell of tainted, moldy earth, and the shadowy outlines of tombstones had alone sufficed to terrify O'Rourke. Cummings was made of sterner stuff, but the pinched and sallow face of old Hodges would have struck terror to the heart of a ghoul.

IN HIS cheap, pineboard coffin under the moon he commanded more respect than he had ever commanded in life. His claw-like hands, folded limply on his chest, the charity clothes in which he had been buried and the rough stubble on his cheeks seemed somehow pathetic, horrible—dragging him forth to meet the light worse than a desecration.

Cummings took a cigarette out of his pocket and stuck it in his pale, twitching

mouth. "We've got to work fast," he muttered. "Nancy has to be in by ten. Freddy will waste maybe fifteen minutes billing and cooing with her in the vestibule of the femme dorm, but we can't count on it."

He lit the cigarette with trembling fingers. "Terry, you and Limerick take hold of his shoulders. Slats and I will lift his legs."

It was a gruesome undertaking. O'Rourke was shaking like a leaf when they rolled the corpse into a tarpaulin, and loaded it on a carry-cot from the college supply room.

The cadaver was limp, flaccid, but remarkably well-preserved. Simeon Hodges had looked cadaverous in life and death had not changed him.

"Well, well," rapped Cummings. "What are we waiting for?"

"My legs," croaked O'Rourke.

"Damn your legs. Get going."

Out of the moonlit cemetery they plodded, four frightened medical students carrying a gruesome burden. Down a narrow dirt road to Miller's junction, and then east between lonely farmhouses to the dormitories, halls and grounds of Carlton Medical School.

Frederick Simpson was a fresh-air fiend. He had gone off with Nancy Summers and left the window of his room on the ground floor of the men's dormitory open to the Warm September night. Removing the wing fasteners on the outside of the screen and passing Simeon Hodges across the sill was a simple matter.

Slater and Cummings climbed into the room while O'Rourke and Limerick remained on the lawn with the carry-cot, hoisting the body up and sighing with relief when it was seized from above and dragged into blackness.

Slater and Cummings gripped the corpse in a sort of half-Nelson and staggered with it to Freddy's bed. It took them scarcely five minutes to accomplish their grisly task. They descended breathlessly, their faces wan in the moonlight.

"Did you tuck him in for the night," whispered Limerick, hoarsely.

"You bet we did. We propped him right up in Freddy's bed, and put a book in his hands. Babcock's Post-Mortem Appearances."

A gruesome smile creased Limerick's thin, bloodless lips. "A living case book, eh?"

"We shouldn't be standing here chinning," interposed O'Rourke. "Freddy'll be back any minute now."

Cummings nodded, rotated the wing fastener till it overlapped the screen and screwed it into place.

"You'd better return that cot to the supply room, Slats," he said. "Keep out of the moonlight and tiptoe when you hit the corridor. You'll find us in Terry's room."

Terry's room was three windows further along, at the southern extremity of the dormitory. Terry was not a fresh air fanatic, but he had left his window open on purpose to the warm autumn night.

The three conspirators climbed in hastily, leaving the screen fastener ajar. They sank into chairs by the window in darkness, and mopped sweat from their brows. O'Rourke had set four wicker chairs in a semi-circle close to the window in preparation for just such an event.

The session of watchful waiting which ensued dragged like a dead eternity. Every once in a while O'Rourke peered out, craning his thin neck and humming to keep his courage up.

FINALLY he saw it. A wide swath of radiance on the trampled lawn immediately beneath Freddy's window. He withdrew his head with a jerk.

"Freddy's back," he whispered, hoarsely.

There was a scraping of chair legs, followed by a muffled oath and Cummings

and Limerick collided a foot from the sill. Ruthlessly Cummings elbowed the younger student aside.

"Yeah, he's standing right by the window," he confirmed. "I can see his shadow on the lawn."

"*You* can see! How about me?"

"Pipe down, Limerick. Keep back. We don't want him to hear us."

"He'll yell out in a second," O'Rourke murmured. "He hasn't seen it yet."

Breathlessly the three students waited for a blood-curdling scream to echo across the campus. They *hoped* it would be blood-curdling. What was the good of frightening Freddy if he didn't go all to pieces and cry out in abject terror.

FOR five full minutes they waited, cursing Freddy inwardly. Finally Cummings jumped up, and started pacing the room like a caged orang-outang.

"Something's wrong," he muttered. "He's either drunk, or we've underestimated him. A lad who can—"

His speech congealed. From beyond the window there had come an unutterably terrifying sound—a metallic screeching and rasping which wrenched a cry from Limerick and jelled the blood in O'Rourke's veins.

This time Cummings and Limerick reached the window simultaneously. Together they stared out, their view-hogging impulses forgotten.

The sound was not repeated. But streaking across the campus in the moonlight was a tall and quaking figure, its arms crooked sharply at the elbows, and its coat-tails flying.

"Freddy!" gasped Cummings. "Just look at him go!"

"As though the Devil were after him," chuckled Limerick. "That sound we heard must have been the screen ripping. He frightens slow, but boy, does it take!"

Cummings sighed with relief. "So that's what it was. I thought for a minute it was a banshee on a tear."

The three students sank down in their chairs and exchanged significant glances. They had put it over. Freddy had had the scare of his life.

They were having a quiet laugh together when there came a knock at the door.

Cumming's grin vanished. "That you, Slats?" he called.

Through the thin panel came the rasping voice of Dr. Amos Harlow, the professor in charge of the men's dormitory. "Your door is bolted on the inside, Mr. O'Rourke. Open it immediately."

Cummings jumped up, swung his chair into the middle of the room and grabbed a book.

Limerick threw himself down on O'Rourke's bed and whipped out a pipe.

"O'Rourke crossed swiftly to the door and threw it open. "Sorry, sir," he apologized.

DR. HARLOW was a wiry little man with snow-white hair and a skin as smooth as a baby's. He fairly stormed into the room, his eyes blazing.

"You know damn well it's an infraction to keep your door bolted after ten-thirty," he rapped.

"Baloney," Cummings murmured.

Dr. Harlow swung on him. "What was that?"

Cummings grimaced. "I said it was *only* an accident, sir. Mr. O'Rourke snapped the bolt absent-mindedly, without thinking."

"Well, all right. But think next time—all of you. You'll turn the dormitory into a fire-trap."

He cleared his throat. "A moment ago I heard a very strange noise on your side of the hall—a sort of tearing sound. It seemed to come from this room. Did you gentlemen—"

"We heard it," said Limerick.

"You did? Then perhaps you can tell me what caused it."

"I—I think it came from outside," stammered O'Rourke. "We heard it through the window."

"Nonsense," snapped Harlow. "How could I hear an outside noise from my side of the hall. Gentlemen, I intend to find out where that sound came from."

He wheeled and walked out of the room. Fearfully, their hearts in their throats, O'Rourke, Cummings and Limerick followed him. "Play innocent and dumb," cautioned Cummings.

Harlow tapped on a dozen doors up and down the corridor before he came to Freddy's room. At Freddy's room he tapped again and again.

"Mr. Simpson," he called. "I wish to speak to you. Are you awake, Simpson?"

There was no reply.

"Better open it, sir," whispered O'Rourke. He knew that Harlow intended to do that very thing, so what was the use of stalling? Harlow would step into the room and run smack into the horror.

It couldn't be avoided now. Harlow had questioned every student on the ground floor with the exception of Freddy and Freddy didn't answer. Harlow would get a jolt too. But *he* wouldn't plunge shrieking through what was left of the screen. He'd swing around and start asking questions.

It would mean expulsion, but it had to be faced. They would have to take their medicine like men.

Harlow's face was purpling when he pushed into the room. "No student could sleep *that* soundly," he muttered.

Tremulously the guilty three piled in after him.

The light was still on in Freddy's room. It flooded over the crumpled bed and the still, white form lying there. Not sitting with a book gruesomely propped up before it, but lying with its head dangling over the foot of the bed and its arms rigidly outflung.

For an instant they thought that Simeon Hodges had simply toppled over. Passing from the darkness of the corridor into the brightly lighted room and seeing what looked like a corpse such a first impression was unavoidable.

For a merciful instant their minds envisaged simply expulsion, disgrace and the difficulty of explaining it to the home folks. Then real horror gripped them, shook them and left them as limp as rags.

Hideously the truth dawned. It wasn't old Hodges lying there. It was Freddy Simpson and he looked—ghastly. Freddy had red hair and a fresh, boyish complexion, but now his face was corpse pale and the blood on his throat was such a bright, glaring red that his hair seemed drab by contrast.

The blood had come from two tiny cuts immediately above Freddy's Adam's Apple. One on each side of his throat—two tiny punctures oozing bright blood.

The reactions of O'Rourke, Limerick and Cummings were as divergent as their personalities.

Cummings said: "My God!" and turned as white as a sheet.

Limerick swore lustily.

O'Rourke said nothing at all. He didn't even cry out. All he did was reel back against the wall and slump to the floor in a dead faint.

Let's Bury Him

IT WAS past midnight when they reassembled in O'Rourke's room to talk it over in hushed whispers. Slater had rejoined them and was adding his voice to the discussions, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched.

"We ought to be thankful he's rallying," he muttered. "I was afraid his overtaxed

heart couldn't stand anything but a saline infusion."

"I'd have given him the hemorrhage emergency treatment," agreed Cummings. "Fifty grains of sodium chloride and sodium sulphate in boiling water by hypodermoclysis. Pumping all that blood into him was risky as hell. But I suppose heroic measures are sometimes justified.

"Stockwell says he was almost *drained* —and Stockwell ought to know. He's stained more leukocytes than any bloodhound in America."

"Stow the shop talk," interjected Limerick. "We're facing a grim situation. I don't believe Simeon Hodges came to life and broke through that screen. I don't believe it was him we saw streaking it across the campus. O'Rourke thinks it was. Okay, O'Rourke believes in vampires. If we want to grovel we couldn't ask for a better explanation.

"Old Simeon was a vampire. We dug up a vampire. He attacked Freddy, bit into his neck and sucked him dry. You saw the teeth marks on Freddy's throat. Blood all over poor Freddy, and we're to blame. We dug up a limp, blood-hungry vampire."

Limerick's lips were twisting in a sneer. "Okay, if you want it that way. We'll put our brains in hock and throw away the loan ticket."

"Limerick," said O'Rourke, his voice strained. "You've got to listen. I'm appealing to you not as a student of medicine, remember. I'm just a run-of-the-mill guy who has done a lot of reading on his own.

"I've read books you've never heard about, by writers with a lot of sound scholarship behind them. Plenty of educated people believe in vampires today. There's an English scholar named Summers who cites hundreds of cases of vampirism in the twentieth century. A few of them have come under his own personal observation.

"He believes in vampires, ghouls, werewolves, and incubi. You can't laugh away the findings of a man like that. He's got more on the ball than any prof in this college. When I read his six-hundred page books for the first time it was as though a hundred ton weight had descended on my brain."

"Yeah, and crushed it," sneered Limerick. "What do you take us for? It's easy to understand why that sort of tripe was taken seriously in the Middle Ages—people had nothing better to do than sit around and wait for something to happen."

"Perhaps someone was spying on us when we dug Simeon up," hazarded Cummings. "Perhaps he tried to scare hell out of us by stealing the corpse, and turning our little joke against us. I wouldn't put it past a couple of seniors I know."

"That wouldn't account for Freddy's loss of blood or the cuts in his throat," objected Slater.

"Stockwell says that Freddy was anaemic," buttressed Limerick. "He was treating Freddy for a mild oligocythemia. How do we know he lost so much blood? Maybe he cut himself while shaving, or something."

Cummings was pacing the room. "All this is getting us nowhere," he muttered. "It isn't far to the cemetery. I move we adjourn to Simeon Hodges' grave."

There was a chorus of assents.

"Maybe Simeon has come home to roost."

"Yeah. Whoever snatched him may have put him back."

"We'd better take our spades along—just in case."

RETURNING to the cemetery was a nightmare ordeal to O'Rourke. His companions seemed to share his forebodings, for they approached Simeon Hodges' grave in complete silence.

Their heavy brogues made a crunching

sound as they plodded over the black, mouldy earth. Between the wind-stirred branches of tall, thick-boled trees they caught occasional glimpses of a moon that seemed to be swimming in a sea of blood.

The illusion chilled O'Rourke more than the huge, misshapen shadows which crouched at the base of the tombstones and slumbered on the neglected graves. He knew that it wasn't the redness of approaching dawn which glimmered between the branches but that mysterious, inexplicable ruddiness which the sky sometimes assumes in the small hours when the moon is gibbous and the night wanes.

THEIR thoughts were sloping down into terror-haunted depths when they arrived at the grave and halted before Simeon Hodges' coffin. The coffin was still standing beside the grave where they had left it, but it was no longer open, and it was no longer empty!

Protruding from one corner of the stained, pine-board casket was a pale, claw-like hand.

"God!" shrieked O'Rourke, his neck-hairs rising in terror.

Limerick dropped his spade and took a swift step backwards. Slater and Cummings stood rooted, their eyse wide and staring.

The coffin was unevenly sprinkled with fresh earth. A crude mound had been built up on one side of it, and part of the heaped earth had spilled over on the closed lid.

O'Rourke was ghastly pale. "He—he must have crawled back himself," he moaned.

Cummings' hands had gone to his face as though to shut out the sight. Now they dropped to reveal a countenance of haggard concern.

"What in hell do you mean?"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face. He clawed up all that earth and climbed back inside before he let the lid fall. He knew that the jar would scatter dirt on the coffin."

It was an ingenious explanation, but Limerick didn't like it. "Why should he do that," he sneered.

"For protection after sunrise," said O'Rourke. "An unburied vampire endures the most horrible torments. He's buried now—symbolically."

"It looks like a one-man job, all right," muttered Slater, awe and terror in his voice.

Limerick wheeled on him.

"Don't be a fool, Slats. This could have been the work of a dozen persons."

"I'll soon find out whether he's a vampire or not," muttered Cummings. "If he has blood-stains on his mouth—"

He was reaching for the coffin lid when O'Rourke grabbed his wrist. "Don't raise that lid, Empty."

Cummings straightened, his lips twitching. "Why—why not?"

"It's dangerous to look at a vampire right after it has *feasted*. We've got to drive a wooden stake through the coffin, Empty. We've got to destroy him tonight. Summers says—"

"To hell with your bogey books," rasped Limerick. "We'll look at him and *then we'll bury him.*"

"All right," said O'Rourke. "Raise the lid then, Limerick. Go on, raise it."

Limerick hesitated, bit his lips.

"Maybe we better just bury him," Cummings said.

Limerick and O'Rourke grasped one end of the coffin and Cummings and Slater the other. They lowered it into the grave and covered it swiftly with earth. O'Rourke shuddered when a spadeful of dirt descended on the protruding hand, but he went right on shoveling.

The grave looked very well when they had finished with it. Not so O'Rourke. He stood for a moment leaning on his spade,

his eyes closed and a terrified expression on his face.

Suddenly he shuddered and stared across the grave at Cummings. "We're standing on the grave of a sated vampire," he said. "I can feel it tugging at my heart. There is a coldness under my heart and—"

"Oh, nuts," sneered Limerick. "I'm going to hit the hay. I'm not afraid of little boy things that go boop in the night."

"We should have driven a stake through the coffin," said O'Rourke grimly. "We'll be sorry we didn't. We'll be sorry, Limerick."

Attack on the Campus

IT DIDN'T seem as though he could be right. Freddy Simpson was sitting up in bed, and Nancy Summers was holding his hand, and because it was another day entirely and the sunlight was flooding into the hospital room old Simeon Hodges' corpse seemed unreal, remote.

The four students had trooped in to see Freddy, but Nancy was getting most of the attention. Nancy was a very intelligent, red-headed girl with a willowy figure and a face which was just right. The four students were badly smitten.

They tried to hide their real feelings from one another, but Nancy was aware of how they felt. "You boys have been swell," she said. "Freddy seems to have a gift for friendship."

"You bet he has," agreed Cummings. "We think a lot of Freddy. I guess he knows that."

Freddy smiled wanly. His thin, freckled face was still abnormally pale.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I had a dizzy spell. Naw, I didn't see anything. As soon as I stepped into the room things began to swim and I went out like a light."

"You didn't cut yourself while shaving, Freddy?" asked O'Rourke.

Freddy shook his head. "Of course not. I use an electric razor, except when I'm in a hurry."

"Freddy, there's a big hole in your window screen. Know anything about that?"

O'Rourke was holding his breath. He hoped that Freddy was telling the truth.

"Not a thing, Terry. You say there were footsteps on the soft earth under my window. Maybe a burglar was hiding in my room. Maybe he socked me from behind with a lead pipe or something. Maybe the blow stunned me, so that I just folded without feeling it."

"Yeah," agreed Limerick. "That would account for it."

"Doctor Harlow thinks Freddy scratched his throat without noticing it," Nancy said. "He thinks he fainted when he saw the blood. Freddy says that's ridiculous, but some people do faint at the sight of blood. Perhaps Freddy saw the blood and it registered in his subconscious—"

"Now, Nancy, you know that's far-fetched," muttered Freddy, blushing slightly despite his pallor. "Blood doesn't affect me like that. If it did, would I be studying medicine?"

"You're just a little boy in some respects, Freddy," said Nancy, maternally. "If you've a psychological handicap you should own up to it."

"He fainted yesterday in the dissecting room," said Limerick, flashing a glance at Nancy which said as plain as words: "Why don't you ditch the kid and take up with a real he-guy, Nancy?"

Freddy glared at him. "It was just biliousness," he said. "I've been studying too hard and I allowed myself to get run down."

"It occurred at a funny time," gibed Limerick, mercilessly.

"Maybe he had another bilious attack last night," prompted Cummings.

"That could be," admitted Freddy. "I'm subject to them."

When the four students left the hospital building they exchanged meaningful glances.

"We're in the clear," said Limerick. "He didn't even catch a glimpse of Simeon."

"And where does that leave us," retorted Cummings. "Someone knows, someone is in on it. Who returned Simeon to the cemetery? It's blackmail I'm worrying about."

"Who would want to blackmail us?"

"I don't know. But someone pulled off a complicated body-snatching stunt. Did he do it for his health?"

"I've warned you," said O'Rourke. "Simeon Hodges is a vampire. He attacked Freddy, sucked his blood, and fled back to the cemetery."

Three scornful medical students, their skepticism restored by the sunlight, parted on the campus from one whom they considered a craven, superstitious fool, going their separate ways in silence.

Limerick and Slater had lectures to attend, and O'Rourke a gymnasium workout. Cummings headed for the school library. He wasn't *quite* as skeptical as Limerick and Slater.

THE small, dark girl at the withdrawal desk was Cummings' consolation date. Her name was Sally Sherwin and she was almost as good-looking as Nancy.

"What do you want with all these scary books, Empty?" she murmured, as she passed over the counter Merrick's *Vampirism in Europe,* Dwight's *The Vampire,* Dunn's *Superstitions of the Dark Ages,* Aldrich's *The Witch Cult,* Street's *Magic Talisman,* and Wayne's *Hungarian Legends.*

"Just amusing myself, Sally," Cummings said. "Sometimes I enjoy that sort of reading. Deep inside me there is a repressed Edgar Allan Poe."

"Well! I didn't know you had literary talents, Empty."

"I have many talents," said Cummings. He put his arm about Sally Sherwin and kissed her till she gasped. Fortunately the library was deserted.

"Now why did I do that?" he asked himself as he carried the books into a secluded alcove. "I'm not in love with her. There is supposed to be some connection between fear and amorous impulses. Perhaps I'm more frightened than I suspect. I wish to hell O'Rourke had kept his trap shut."

The books were horribly depressing. Merrick, Street and Wayne professed to disbelieve in vampires, but *something* had unquestionably scared them. Every page he turned carried shrill and hysterical admonitions. Dwight refused to commit himself. Dunn wavered between belief and skepticism.

The most reassuring sentences were in *Superstitions of the Dark Ages*:

> It was commonly believed that no vampire would attack a man or woman bearing a cross and protected by a necklace of garlic. It was also believed that no vampire could leave its grave before sundown.
>
> Ambrose Pere observes, however, that heavily overcast skies often lure vampires from the earth and that during thunderstorms they range the countryside with a hellish and illicit greediness.
>
> It was also believed that vampires could imitate the voices of the living, and insinuate themselves with diabolical cunning into the domiciles of maidens.

Cummings was so absorbed in the Middle Ages that he scarcely noticed how dismal the library had become. Hunched and purplish shadows clustered about the deserted book racks and the sunlight which had been pouring down through the tall

windows behind him had ceased to warm the back of his neck.

He closed the book at last, stacked it with the others and returned the entire pile to the desk. "I'll call for you at eight-thirty, Sally," he said.

Sally Sherwin scowled. "You know what happened the last time we went stepping. You kept me out so late I lost my date privileges for two weeks."

"I'm sorry about that Sally," said Cummings, contritely. "It won't happen again."

"I'll say it won't. You've seen to it that I can't walk out of the dorm with you like a decent girl. I have to sneak out by the window."

"It's more romantic that way," said Cummings. "I'll be under your window at eight-thirty sharp."

Sally sighed. "All right, heart-throb. But if it rains the date is off."

"If it *rains?* Why should it rain? There wasn't a cloud in the sky when I—"

His speech jelled. The dismalness which had crept over the library could mean only one thing. During his researches the sun had ceased to bathe the campus in a warm and mellow glow!

TURNING from the desk he hurried along the deserted corridors of the library building, and out onto the campus. The campus was bathed in an ominous *negation* of light which struck a chill to his heart.

The ivy-draped quadrangle of dormitories and lecture halls loomed eerily through the murk, their Gothic outlines reminding him of something out of Sir Walter Scott.

He stood before the library building staring in amazement at a running figure. The figure had emerged from the Hall of Pharmacy, and was running straight toward him. A slim, pale girl running. He recognized her instantly despite the darkness.

"Nancy!" he exclaimed, and strode forward to meet her.

She swayed when she saw him and tottered forward until she was in his arms. "Nancy, what is it?"

Sobbingly she clung to him, her whole body trembling.

"It's Slats," she moaned. "They've taken him into the pharmacy building. Oh, it's horrible, Empty. His throat is torn, *mangled.* He's drenched with blood. He's dying, Empty—there's nothing they can do for him."

Cummings turned deathly pale. He stared at her aghast, cold perspiration breaking out all over him. "When—when did this happen, Nancy?"

"They found him in Norwood Lane about ten minutes ago. You know how dark it is there, even when the sun is shining."

Cummings knew. Norwood Lane ran between the Hall of Pharmacy and the Hospital Unit. It was simply a narrow alleyway between the two buildings, a sort of lover's lane where students petted in shadows on their way to the lecture rooms. Brick-walled and ivy-festooned, it offered a seclusion for furtive embraces at high noon and for more leisurely love-making after dark.

"You mean—you were there with him, Nancy?"

Nancy Summers shook her head. "I was coming out of Doc Whitehead's classroom when they brought him into the hall. I was so sickened I—I just ran, Empty.

"I know it was cowardly, Empty, but I couldn't help it. My stomach twisted and I had to get out fast."

Cummings nodded. "I understand, Nancy. It was perfectly natural. We knew Slats, loved him. He was a great little guy. He had his faults, but there'll never be another Slats."

"I just ran, Empty. I wasn't looking

for you or anybody. I just wanted to get as far as I could away."

"Sure, sure, Nancy, I understand," Cummings soothed.

"Empty, his throat was horribly torn. Do you think it was an animal, Empty? A rabid dog?"

"There are no blood-sucking dogs, Nancy."

"A bat then? Empty, isn't there a huge, South American vampire bat which attacks men? Perhaps one of those bats was shipped north in a crate of oranges or bananas, and has escaped and crawled into a hollow tree somewhere on the campus."

Cummings' face was grim. "No, Nancy. The blood-sucking bat of South America has a wing span of scarcely three inches. It couldn't tear a man's throat or suck more than a thimbleful of blood. The *big* South American bats are fruit-eaters—perfectly harmless."

"But something fiendish attacked Freddy last night and now Slats. Oh, Empty, I'm frightened!"

Night Visit

CUMMINGS was frightened, too, but he kept his emotions to himself. Only Limerick and O'Rourke knew. A half hour later they were at Simeon Hodges' grave again. The sun was westerning rapidly and the sloping tombstones now seemed drenched with blood. On all sides of them were tumbled mounds of freshly upturned earth.

They were digging like mad. Sweat was streaming from them and they were wearing necklaces of garlic which O'Rourke had bought at the village Italian fruit store. They were getting down to the coffin as fas as they could.

"I can't understand it," muttered Cummings. "How did he get back in without disturbing the earth?"

"A vampire can turn into a thin mist and filter through a screen, a keyhole, under a door or down through the earth," panted O'Rourke. "The last time *we* left the coffin above ground and he had to bury himself. Now the coffin's under four feet of earth. He simply seeped back."

"I don't know why I'm doing this," grumbled Limerick. "You're both as mad as March hares. There's nothing but a dried-up old guy in that coffin named Simeon Hodges. He's been out and around, sure. But that's because we took him out and somebody with a rotten sense of humor put him back."

"You're wearing a necklace of garlic, Limerick," said O'Rourke. "Why don't you take it off?"

Limerick grunted. "When you're with fools do as fools do. Why should I make myself conspicuous?"

There was a dull, heavy thud. "Careful," warned Cummings. "We don't want to smash the coffin."

"We made our big mistake when we brought him into the dormitory," muttered O'Rourke. "Once you bring a vampire into your home or invite him in he can flow back anytime. You might as well try to keep out smoke, or running water."

"He had to break the screen to get out," said Cummings. "That proves he could not—"

"It doesn't prove a thing. He simply wanted to get out quickly. I'm telling you, Empty, he can seep in and out now by simply changing himself into a puff of vapor. By driving this stake through his heart we'll be saving three lives. Important lives, Empty—our own."

He patted the long, wooden stake which protruded from his hip pocket. "We should have destroyed him last night when he was glutted and rosy from the blood that came out of poor Freddy."

"He'll still be rosy," said Cummings, grimly.

They were breast-deep in the grave now

and rapidly uncovering the horror. Spadefuls of dirt went flying out over the grave, to the accompaniment of hollow thumpings as their spades grazed the half-exposed coffin.

"There are three different ways of destroying a vampire," said O'Rourke. "You can pour vinegar and boiling water into the grave, you can cut off its head, or use a stake, as we are doing. In the Ukraine they—"

"Get the hell up out of there!"

The voice was harsh, menacing and came from directly above them. Cummings gasped and stared up blinking. O'Rourke and Limerick stood rooted, their spades arrested in mid-air.

STANDING at the edge of the grave was a sandy-haired little man around fifty years old, armed with a sawed-off shotgun. His eyes were frosty.

"I said, climb up out of there, the three of you."

O'Rourke and Cummings lost no time in complying. Sexton William Sharp was reputed to be a good shot and a very hot-tempered man when crossed. Limerick hesitated an instant but clambered up fast enough when the gun barrel started sloping down into the grave.

"I've heard tell of such outrages, but I never thought I'd live to—medical students, eh?"

Cummings caught O'Rourke's eye and inclined his head the fraction of an inch. "He was just a nobody, Mr. Sharp," he said. "He had no relatives or friends. We needed a subject and we thought—"

"You thought you'd rob a poor dead man of his repose. It's a burning shame. You were going to dissect him, I suppose?"

"That was our intention, Mr. Sharp," said Cummings, looking contrite.

"Well, you're going to put all that earth back," stormed Sharp. "Otherwise I'll report you and have you expelled. I ought to report you anyway. You're just a bunch of young hyenas."

Refilling the grave under Sharp's supervision was a back-breaking task. The sexton stood over them and gave them no respite. They were still at it when the sun passed from view below the horizon and darkness settled down over the cemetery.

Limerick had started muttering to himself. "I'm getting fed up with this. Digging him up, putting him back. Of all the fool—"

He stiffened suddenly. Beneath his spade the earth was stirring, heaving. A chill of horror passed over him. His eyes went wide and his throat became as dry as death.

Simeon Hodges was pushing up through the loose, dark earth with loathsome writhings. His pale, clawlike hands emerged first; then the bulge of his shoulders, and finally, his head. The upper portion of his body shot up straight.

Like a leprous gargoyle he swayed rigid in the moonlight, his gore-caked, tattered garments flapping in the night wind, his face contorted in a malign and hideous mask.

O'Rourke and Cummings saw it simultaneously. O'Rourke let loose a wild shriek, dropped his spade and went staggering backwards. Cummings stood as though turned to stone. He stood staring with wide eyes and gaping jaw, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down.

The vampire was staring up at Sexton Sharp, its dead, white eyes fastened on his throat. Even in the midst of his terror Limerick found himself wondering whether the foul thing was not some sort of hoax.

But when it leapt soundlessly from the grave, flung itself on the cemetery's guardian and bore him to earth his last doubts were dispelled.

He turned and fled in terror from a greedily feasting vampire crouching above its victim, hideous, sucking sounds com-

ing from its mouth. Fled across country, between lonely farmhouses, stumbling in blind panic over fallen branches and bruising his shins on stone fences and ramshackle stiles.

He was halfway to the college when he became aware of footsteps pounding at his heels. Reluctantly he slowed up, allowing Cummings and O'Rourke to overtake him.

O'Rourke was out of breath from running. "The garlic worked," he panted. "It protected us. But we've got to rouse the dormitory and distribute necklaces to all the students. It's loose for the night! That ghastly thing is loose!"

"Sharp's dead," contributed Cummings, his face ghastly white. "The vampire slashed open his throat and then tried to attack us. But the garlic hurled it back. The last we saw of it it had turned into a bat. It was circling upward *and heading for the college, Limerick.*"

Limerick muttered: "I don't see how in hell a little sprig of garlic could do that."

SALLY SHERWIN was powdering her nose when she heard the tapping. Unmistakably it was coming from just outside her window—a persistent tapping on the screen.

An irritable frown creased her attractive features. She was sitting before her dresser with her back to the screen. Her coiffure was flawless, but there were still some things she wanted to do to her face. She needed at least ten more minutes to transform herself into a really glamorous person.

It was very annoying. Why couldn't Cummings wait? He was always ahead of time.

He just didn't seem to realize that no girl likes to be rushed into keeping a date. Especially a furtive, against-the-rules date which included descending from the window into the arms of a man.

She said without turning around: "All right, Empty. Don't be impatient."

The tapping ceased abruptly. There was an instant of silence and then a faint whisper drifted into the room.

"Why can't I come in, Sally? It's chilly out here?"

Sally straightened in indigation. She wasn't conventional or prudish, but she bridled at the thought that perhaps Cummings didn't respect her. He had kept her out late, scandalously late, and now he was urging her to risk expulsion by inviting a man into the girl's dormitory.

"No, you can't come in," she said. "You'll have to wait. Take a walk around the campus, if you're cold."

"Be reasonable, Sally. You've finished dressing. I'll climb in without making a sound."

"No, go away. You ought to be ashamed to even suggest such a thing."

"If I go away, Sally, I may not come back."

Sally Sherwin bit her lip. She was just crazy enough about the big, handsome, athletic Cummings not to want to lose him.

"All right," she said. "You can come in. But you'll have to wait a minute."

Hastily she rouged her lips, an angry flush stealing up over her face. The concessions which a girl had to make merely to hold a man were outrageous. It was a man's world entirely. A girl had no rights, no—

"It was kind of you to invite me in," said a deep, sepulchral voice behind her.

Terrified, she whirled about. The vampire was advancing toward her with bared teeth, its dead, white eyes roaming all over her. There was blood on its clawlike hands and its tattered clothes were drenched, sodden.

About its hunched shoulders swirled a grayish mist which slowly dissolved as it advanced, the last dispersing wisps of its de-materialized state.

The gray, mottled flesh of Simeon Hodges was all compact again after its brief percolation through the screen, a shambling horror that advanced soullessly upon the terrified girl and cackled in hellish mirth.

An Arrow for the Restless Dead

IN ANOTHER second the distance between the girl and the hideous thing had been bridged, and Sally Sherwin was screaming in its embrace.

Frantically she struggled to free herself. She jerked her shoulders back and beat with clenched fists upon its boardlike chest, her breath coming in heaving gasps.

The horror's breath was fetid, its squirming body reeking with the odors of the grave. Mercilessly its long, dirt-encrusted fingernails raked her flesh, inflicting deep gashes on her bared back and heaving bosom.

For five full minutes Sally fought with every ounce of her strength. So frenzied were her struggles that she did not hear the door open or see Nancy Summers advancing into the room, a look of unutterable horror on her face.

Nancy Summers was clutching a four-foot wooden bow and a gleaming bob-tailed arrow. When Nancy Summers had borrowed Sally's bow-and-arrow set to practice with on the school archery range she had never dreamed that returning it would expose her to the most ghastly peril she had ever known. She stood now white and shaken, her mouth as dry as death.

She could hear the pounding of her own heart above the vampire's harsh breathing.

"Don't touch me! No, no!" There was a strangling horror in Sally's voice. The vampire had seized her dark hair in one scrawny hand and was fastening its greedy lips on her throat.

Nancy Summers nocked her bow with automatic fingers, her gaze riveted on the cadaver's squirming back. The room and Sally seemed to recede as she stared. She had eyes only for that ghastly twisting liche —a shape more foul and terrifying than all the sensations of nightmare.

She knew that she must kill it. Swiftly, remorselessly, or Sally would be lost. Her eyes did not waver as she raised the bow and took deliberate aim.

There was a sharp twang. Screeching, the thing that had been Simeon Hodges twisted about and tugged frantically at the long, barbed shaft which was quivering between its shoulder blades.

Nancy shrank back against the wall and stared wide-eyed at the petrifying sight of blood gushing from the horror's mouth and spattering on walls which were spinning and heaving sickeningly.

The vampire had turned and was stumbling straight toward her across the room, its gray face twisting in anguish, the arrow still vibrating in its flesh.

Its eyes were glazed, but it seemed to sense that Nancy was responsible for its plight. Nancy's head was spinning madly. She feared that she was going to faint. She saw Sally Sherwin sway, clutch at the dresser and slump with delirious babblings to her knees, her hair falling over her face. She saw the vampire's arms go out—

She could smell the taint of it now. It was very near and reaching for her and she could not move at all. She stood as though paralyzed, terror beating into her brain.

An instant of sickening unreality followed. She thought the vampire was already upon her and then she wasn't sure and then an awful coldness seemed to sweep over her.

THEN—Oh, Merciful God—came the sound of a familiar voice. "Get her out of here, Limerick. Damn it, man, take over."

Strong, muscular hands descended on her shoulders and pulled her toward the

door. She shuddered convulsively, but offered no resistance. Dimly she sensed that Limerick was too terrified to realize how cruelly he was bruising her flesh. Through the door he dragged her, his breath rattling in his throat.

"His number is up, Nancy," he wheezed. "Empty is putting the squeeze on him."

Nancy's lips twisted but no sound came from them. She had caught a brief, hideous glimpse of the vampire writhing beneath Cummings on the floor. Cummings had pinned the foul thing down with his knees and was driving the long, wooden arrow deep, *deep* into its quivering body.

For an instant through the doorway she saw its dark blood gushing out over Cummings' hands. Then the merciful dimness of the corridor enveloped her, blotting out the sight.

Briefly she saw crude wooden crosses waving in the dim corridor light and smelt the sickening odor of garlic. Then the white, terror-convulsed faces of milling students swam close to her and coalesced into an enormous gray smudge which swooped and swirled and spilled over her until she went utterly limp in Limerick's arms.

It was curious how seldom a girl fainted in just the right pair of arms. When awareness came sweeping back the first person she thought of was Freddy.

She felt very sorry for Freddy—poor kid. She had foolishly imagined that she was in love with him. It was just her maternal instinct running away with her, she realized that now.

Lying on a sofa in the reception room of the girls' dormitory, staring up into Cummings' anxious blue eyes, she realized that there was only one man for her in all the world.

"Thank God we heard you scream in time, Nancy," Cummings said. "We never thought it would try to get into the femme dorm."

Nancy smiled wanly. "I'd rather not talk about it, darling," she said. "Not just now."

"Darling!"

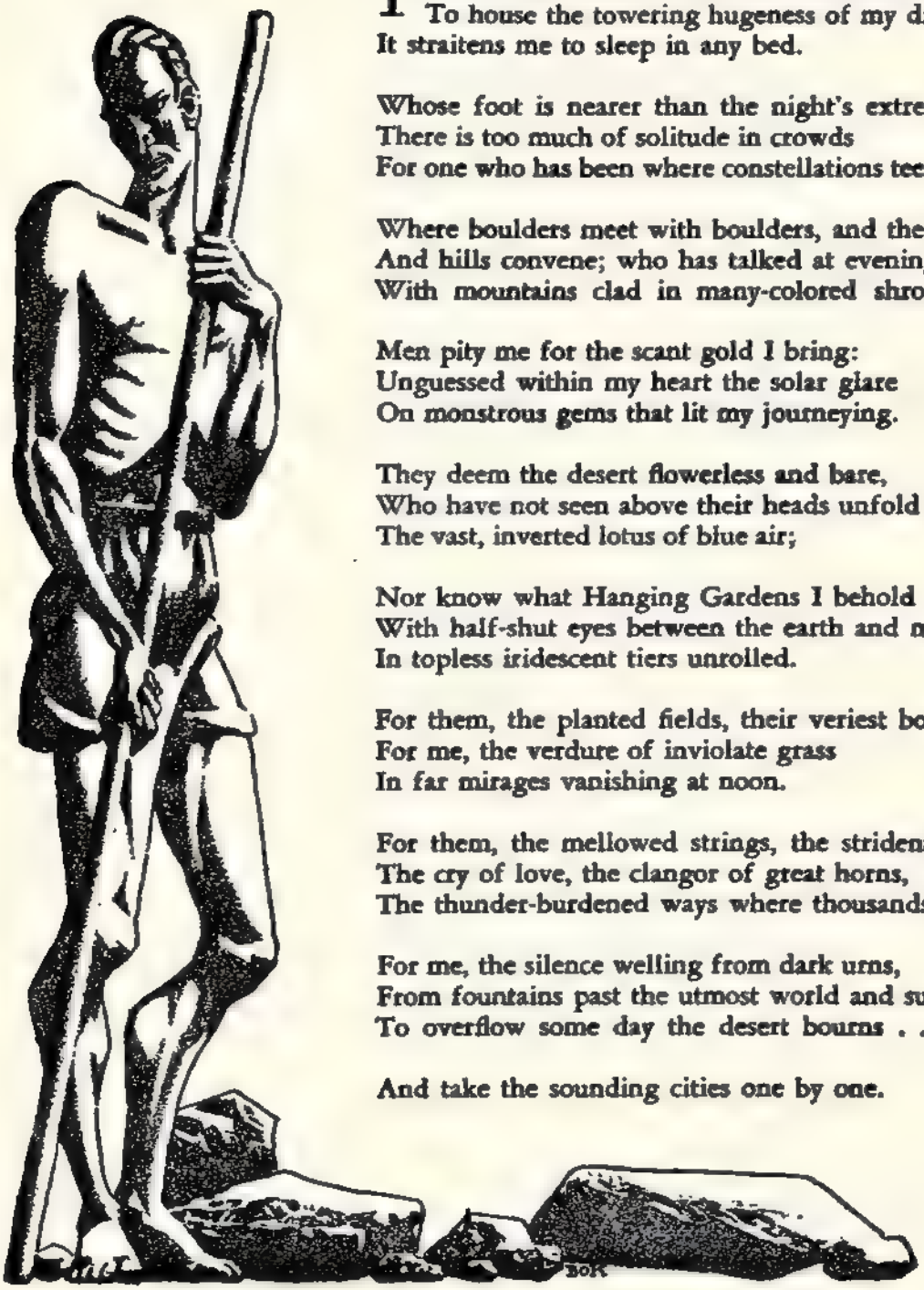
"I *said* darling."

For an instant she thought that Cummings was going to pass out from shock. She had to reach up and pull his head down and kiss him on the mouth to bring back even a little color to his face.

"I don't think so much of your bedside manner, darling," she said.

Desert Dweller

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH



THERE is no room in any town (he said)
To house the towering hugeness of my dream.
It straitens me to sleep in any bed.

Whose foot is nearer than the night's extreme.
There is too much of solitude in crowds
For one who has been where constellations teem,

Where boulders meet with boulders, and the clouds
And hills convene; who has talked at evening
With mountains clad in many-colored shrouds.

Men pity me for the scant gold I bring:
Unguessed within my heart the solar glare
On monstrous gems that lit my journeying.

They deem the desert flowerless and bare,
Who have not seen above their heads unfold
The vast, inverted lotus of blue air;

Nor know what Hanging Gardens I behold
With half-shut eyes between the earth and moon
In topless iridescent tiers unrolled.

For them, the planted fields, their veriest boon;
For me, the verdure of inviolate grass
In far mirages vanishing at noon.

For them, the mellowed strings, the strident brass,
The cry of love, the clangor of great horns,
The thunder-burdened ways where thousands pass.

For me, the silence welling from dark urns,
From fountains past the utmost world and sun . . .
To overflow some day the desert bourns . . .

And take the sounding cities one by one.

SUPERSTITIONS

TO SEAL THE FATE OF A VICTIM, THREE OLD WOMEN OF THE WESTERN BALKANS MEET AT A CROSSROADS WHEN THE MOON IS FULL. DISCARDING THEIR CLOTHES AND ENTIRELY NUDE, *THEY DANCE ABOUT AND GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF PLOWING*. THIS IS KEPT UP UNTIL THEY ARE NEAR EXHAUSTION, WHILE THE NAME OF THE VICTIM IS REPEATED OVER AND OVER AGAIN. IT IS THEIR BELIEF THAT THE BEWITCHED WILL SUFFER INTENSE PAIN AND THAT A **SPEEDY DEATH WILL RESULT!**

AND TABOOS by Nell

THE ANCIENTS THOUGHT THAT IF A PERSON SUFFERING FROM JAUNDICE LOOKED SHARPLY AT A **STONE-CURLEW**, AND THE BIRD LOOKED STEADILY AT HIM *HE WOULD BE CURED OF THE DISEASE!* THIS VALUABLE PROPERTY OF THE BIRD WAS SO WELL RECOGNIZED THAT WHEN ONE OF THEM WAS FOR SALE IT WAS KEPT CAREFULLY COVERED, LEST A JAUNDICED PERSON SHOULD LOOK AT IT AND BE ***CURED FOR NOTHING!***

TO HAVE A **HUNCHBACK** ABOUT THE PREMISES IS BELIEVED TO BRING **GOOD LUCK!** IN FORMER YEARS KINGS USED TO HAVE A COURT FOOL WHO WAS USUALLY A HUNCHBACK, NOT ONLY TO MAKE MERRIMENT FOR THEM, *BUT TO INSURE GOOD LUCK!*

Legacy in Crystal

By JAMES CAUSEY

Never accept a gift from a necromancer or demon. Steal it or buy it, but do not accept it as a gift . . . or legacy.

AGATHA SIMMONS leaned forward expectantly.

"How long, Doctor?"

The man at the bedside looked up in brief distaste. He consulted his watch professionally.

"I really can't say," he whispered. "Perhaps another half hour. Perhaps ten more

minutes—" He blinked at her and recommenced fumbling in his bag.

Agatha was silent. She looked at Jonathan's closed eyes. His breathing was barely perceptible now. She smiled.

So long. She had waited so terribly long for her cousin's estate. He must be well past eighty. In the past, she had been dimly afraid he would outlive her as he had all his other relatives.

But now—

"I must get some water." The doctor's voice intruded upon her thoughts. "For the solution—"

He went to the door, fumbling with his hypodermic needle.

Agatha did not hear him. She was gazing around the great gloomy bedroom. At the shades, drawn.

Behind the doctor, the door closed. The prone figure in the big four-poster bed stirred.

"Impatient, Agatha?"

She gave a little start. Jonathan Miles had raised himself on one elbow, with an effort.

He was staring at her, his thin dark face mocking.

"Why—no, Jonathan. I was only hoping you'd get well soon."

"Hah!" The old man cackled with laughter. "Me get well soon! You know, you remind me of a buzzard, Agatha. Waiting for me to die. A pity, too. That auto accident. Mashed ribs. . . . Complications. I bet I would have outlived you, too—"

He broke off, lips still moving. Agatha frowned, then as she noted his breathing become slower, more fluttery, she restrained a smile.

No one knew how Jonathan Miles had acquired his vast fortune. He had always been a scholar, delving into out of the way places in far-off lands. A dabbler in archaeology. Suddenly, in his middle years, he had struck it rich. Now, in the declining years of his life, he had lived all alone, a gloomy old recluse in a dark old house, spurning all efforts of his relatives to visit him.

AGATHA'S gaze flicked avidly around the room. This old house—everything, would be hers soon.

She glanced at a ring on Jonathan's finger. A rather big diamond, that.

Jonathan Miles followed her avid gaze keenly. He chuckled.

"Ah, but you're a greedy woman, Agatha."

"Why, I—"

"I don't *like* greedy women."

Agatha was silent. For the fortune soon to be hers, she could well endure a few insults.

Then she blinked. For Jonathan was fumbling with the ring on his finger, and he was handing it to her.

"Here, Agatha." His smile was vaguely mocking. "Take this. A little token of my esteem. No, don't thank me—"

He made a feeble gesture and sank back on his pillow.

"You'd take it after I'm dead, anyway—so I give it to you now."

"Jonathan! Really, I had no idea of—"

"Keep the ring," Jonathan said softly. "It has helped me—a great deal." His shoulders rippled with silent laughter.

Agatha stared at the ring. It was not a diamond. A large rosy crystal, gleaming lambently in the dim light. Set in a massive base of silver with strange symbols carven on it.

"What do you mean, Jonathan—helped you?"

Her cousin did not seem to hear her. He was staring at the ceiling. His lips were trembling. "My soul," he whispered. "I'm afraid the bargain wasn't . . . quite . . . just."

"What?"

No answer.

Agatha looked at him. Jonathan's eyes were closed.

He was not breathing.

AGATHA drew a deep breath and went to the door.

Walter Simmons, standing in the parlor, saw his wife emerge from the bedroom. He blinked guiltily, and quickly hid his cigar.

"Walter! He's dead. Dead, you hear? This house—his money. All ours." She was jubilant.

"Uh—fine," said Walter, though inwardly he flinched at his wife's callousness.

The doctor came back from the kitchen, his hypodermic filled. "What's this? Did you say he was—"

"Dead," said Agatha, and hardly could restrain her morbid pride in possession of the house until the doctor had completed the necessary formalities and departed.

Walter Simmons heard the front door slam behind the physician and felt quite sorry for him, having had to deal with Agatha in her present mood.

"Walter!" His wife's voice was shrill.

"Yes, dear."

His wife sniffed suspiciously. "Cigar smoke. How often have I told you—"

"I'm sorry," Walter said nervously.

"Well, let's see. There's this living-room—ghastly old place. Gloomy. We'll have chintz curtains put in instead of those dreadful black drapes. The whole place needs remodeling. Maybe we'll sell it . . . later."

"Yes, dear."

"Of course you'll quit your bookkeeping job," mused Agatha. "We'll live here for the time being."

Walter Simmons nodded meekly. Ever since their marriage ten years ago he'd led a dog's life. Do this. Do that. Don't smoke cigars in the house. You know they're bad for my asthma. Now Agatha would have all the money. His life would be worse than ever. . . .

He saw her tall, ungainly figure move about from doorway to doorway, criticizing, exclaiming, planning.

Walter sighed and went into the study. It was a huge dark place, with queer paintings on the walls. Near the center of the room was a dusty desk piled high with books.

Walter looked at these books. Old they were, crumbling with mildew. He paused, fascinated. He opened one book which was lying on the desk, closed. He frowned.

"Greek," he murmured disgustedly. He'd had four years of it in college. Squinting, he tried to decipher some of the words sprawling blackly across the pages. . . .

Walter Simmons turned very pale. He shut the book quickly, and moved away from the desk where he stood for a moment, rubbing his hands suspiciously as if something had contaminated them.

Presently, fascination overcame his horror, and he stepped forward, looking at the book. But he did not touch it. His lips moved as he tried to decipher the faded dark words on the cover.

"The Nec— Necro—" he blinked. Cautiously, he turned the cover and looked at the first page.

Small and precise, the scrawl read.

Greek Trans. Abdul Azhelred.

Walter Simmons did not look into the book again. He remembered what he had read, and shivered.

He glanced at the other books. One caught his eye.

Des Vermis Mysteries. Prinn.

There was a little slip of white paper thrust in the middle as a bookmark. Gingerly, he opened. He frowned. It was in Latin, of which he knew little, and there were penciled translations upon the sides. On the piece of paper was scrawled.

Trans. P. 103—

Never accept a gift from a necromancer

or demon. Steal it, buy it, earn it, but do not accept it, either as a gift or legacy.

The word *legacy*, was circled in red pencil.

Walter Simmons stared at some of the strangely shaped hieroglyphics just beneath the notation. He licked his lips.

He looked around the huge dark study, and suddenly got out of there—fast.

"WAL—*TER!*"

"Yes, dear," he said, wiping the sweat from his brow as he stepped into the living-room. Agatha looked at him sharply.

"Here I tell you about how I'm going to redecorate this place, and I turn around and you're off browsing somewhere. Fine thing, I must say . . ." She paused in mid-sentence.

"Did you hear something?"

Walter swallowed uneasily. "No, I—"

The sound was repeated. The faint tinkle of the doorbell.

Walter and Agatha stared at each other.

"Probably the doctor," sniffed Agatha, brushing back a lock of straggly brown hair. "Phoned the undertaker, probably, to take the body away."

Walter answered the door. He blinked nearsightedly and stepped back.

The stranger standing in the doorway bowed. He was tall, and impeccably clad in striped trousers and tails.

Walter stared entranced, at his flourishing auburn beard.

"Good afternoon." Their visitor straightened, and stepped into the room, smiling disarmingly at Agatha.

Agatha stifled a faint feeling of apprehension. "What do you want?"

"I? The man smiled—oddly, it seemed to Walter. "I was wondering about Jonathan. Is he—"

"He's dead," said Agatha. "Passed away ten minutes ago."

"What a pity. Ten minutes, eh? I hardly expected him to last so long. Exceeded his time by a good three hours. Ah, well. Hardy fellow Jonathan. I—ah—decided I'd stop by and see what the delay was." One hand stroked his long beard absently.

Walter Simmons took a step backwards. There was a strange shine to this fellow's eyes he did not like, nor the way he kept looking about the big house, almost—reflectively.

As usual, Agatha took the bull by the horns.

"What's your name, anyway?"

"My name?" The man's eyes glowed. "Sat—never mind. Never mind. I managed Jonathan's—legal affairs for him."

"Legal affairs?"

"Certainly. It was largely through me, Madame, that Jonathan acquired all his money . . . this house." His eyes flicked around the room briefly, fixed themselves upon the crystal ring on Agatha's left index finger.

"Ah!"

"What's wrong?" inquired Agatha uncomfortably.

"That ring. Believe it or not, I gave that to Jonathan. It—helped him, a great deal."

"Oh," snapped Agatha. "You gave it to him. Well, it's mine now, see? He gave it to me!"

"Gave it to you?" The stranger's shoulders shook silently, anud he made a laughing face, though no sound came forth "My, but that's good. Lively fellow Jonathan. Always did have a sense of humor. Well, I always give warning . . ."

"Warning?"

"Yes. That ring. It's Jonathan's. It really should remain with him, you know."

"If you're trying to threaten me—'

"No indeed I assure you." Again came that strange smile, and one hand stroked the brown flowing beard. "And this house

was in the contract we made. It was to be taken too. . . ."

Walter Simmons was not listening. He was staring, aghast, at the man's head. At the two little curls of hair jutting up just off his brow.

Like two horns.

And that shadow on the wall behind him. It had a very disconcerting shape, indeed.

Agatha had, however, regained her self-composure. "What do you want here?"

"Nothing—now." Their visitor smiled urbanely at them both and bowed. "I have it. Good day."

They both stood mute as he crossed to the front door. He opened it. He went out.

"Well!" said Agatha. "I never! Trying to scare me into getting rid of this ring. Walter. Go see which way he went."

Uncomfortably, Walter went to the window, looked out. The stranger was nowhere in sight.

"THE lawn'll have to be changed," said Agatha.

Walter nodded, silently. He was wondering why the lawn outside the house was so parched and sere.

Jonathan's funeral had been yesterday. "As soon as possible," Agatha had told the undertaker. Well, thought Walter, the undertaker had certainly been obliging. He wished disconsolately, for a cigar.

Agatha stared at the house possessively. "We'll go to the bank tomorrow, and see what he had in his vaults," she mused.

"But—" Walter found himself saying desperately. "I—I don't think it would look good Agatha. So soon after the funeral. . . ."

"Don't be so childish. Of course it'll look all right. And I'm having the remodelers start in tomorrow."

Walter sighed and looked up at the old house, looming huge and gaunt in the gathering dusk. Like an old, empty skull, he thought. The windows like two dark eye-sockets, the door like—

He stopped thinking. He seized Agatha by the arm.

"Look!"

Agatha stared. Her mouth dropped open, and then she started screaming shrilly for firemen, police, anyone—to come and save her house. Her beautiful house.

The house was on fire.

It was no use. The firemen squirted streams of silver water against it, long into the night. Agatha bothered the firemen interminably, until finally a cop shoved her back into the crowd with the gruff admonition to "Keep back lady. We're doin' all we can."

Walter stood back in the crowd, watching the blaze. Great gouts of flame mounting crimson and splendid against the night sky. The screaming of the sirens in the distance. The wild confusion. . . .

Walter could not help smiling. He remembered what he had seen in that book on Jonathan Miles desk.

Such a book as that should very well be destroyed. Walter thought of these things, and how he could not possibly live in this house now, and he was glad.

BUT afterwards, on the homeward drive, he did not feel so glad. Agatha kept wailing, and alternately blaming him, the firemen, and their strange visitor of three days ago.

"It's all your fault. You know it is. You dropped a cigarette or something on the rug and it caught fire—" She paused again for breath.

"But Agatha, I didn't—"

"Shut up!" Walter cowered back behind the wheel, and was silent.

"Or maybe," said Agatha ominously, "it was that fellow who said he was a lawyer. The one with the beard and the funny

smile. I bet he did it. Just 'cause I wouldn't give him this ring."

Walter was silent. Their visitor had said something about Jonathan. Having his little joke. Giving the ring to Agatha. And that odd crystal set in it.

"Well, anyway," Agatha said with an air of apparent unconcern. "The bonds in his safe-deposit boxes at the bank are safe. Three quarters of a million worth, so the executors said."

"And besides I got this—" She rubbed her ring reflectively. Wonder how much it's worth? Sure shines pretty, doesn't it, Walter?"

"Yes, dear," he said mechanically.

He glanced sideways at the ring. He shivered, as he saw the symbols carven in the sides. Strange twisting runes, like the ones he had seen on that little piece of paper back in Jonathan's study. . . .

"Agatha," he ventured timidly. "Agatha, maybe you'd better sell that ring. I think—"

No answer.

He turned.

Agatha was staring into the crystal with a strained, rapt expression. Walter Simmons swallowed uncomfortably as he looked at the crystal.

In the darkness, it had a dim reddish tint, it seemed to be pulsing with a strange unsteady glow. It looked—eerie.

Walter bit his lip.

Yes, the crystal looked remarkably like some gleaming, baleful eye.

The next morning, they went to the bank.

Agatha bustling ahead, buoyed up with a sense of her own importance; Walter, trailing small and timid, just behind.

Agatha informed the bank clerk they were the heirs of Jonathan Miles, and why they had come.

"Ah, yes," the clerk said. "Right this way, please."

They went down to the vault.

"Mr. Miles, you understand, always did business with us by mail," said the clerk, pausing uncertainly in front of them.

"Yes," Agatha said impatiently. "Of course. Let's see in the boxes."

The man drew out the two safe-deposit boxes slowly, opened them. "At last reports Mr. Miles told us he had two hundred thousand dollars worth of negotiable securities in this one," he began abstractly. "And almost half-a-million in bonds in this—"

His voice choked off. He blinked.

Agatha stared, and Walter stared, and then Agatha's voice rose in a shrill, angry scream, demanding to know where the money was. Who was the thief, and why didn't the bank take care of what belonged to her, and was this the right deposit box after all?

Where was her money?

The bank clerk could not explain it.

The boxes were empty. That was plain.

And for a very brief moment, as Agatha stared around the vault, trembling, clenching and unclenching her fists on empty air, she seemed to hear the faint tinkle of distant laughter.

Jonathan's laughter.

THE president of the bank could not explain it either. He looked quite grave, informed them there would be an investigation made, but Agatha refused to be consoled.

"We'll sue them, that's what we'll do!" she announced grimly to Walter afterwards. "First the house, now the money. You—you realize what this means?"

"Yes," said Walter a little wearily. "I suppose I'll have to get my job back."

"You certainly will! And furthermore—" And she was off on another tirade.

Walter did not say anything. He was thinking. Thinking about what the stranger had said.

"This house will have to be taken with the rest—"

The *rest*. The bank securities. The house. Everything. Remembering the way the stranger's shadow had looked, Walter Simmons was not surprised that the bank president had been unable to explain the disappearance of the bonds.

THE remainder of the week dragged slowly. They managed to sell the lot the house had been on for a rather pitiful sum, but Agatha was at least half-satisfied.

"I can buy me that fur wrap from *Modent's* I've always wanted," she told him Friday night over the supper-table. "And maybe some new silver—"

"Walter's forehead wrinkled. "But how about that—Pipe you promised me for Christmas, dear? The red briar—"

"Oh, shut up! Always thinking of yourself. Why can't I have a husband that thinks of his wife once in awhile. Let's see. . . . I'll wear it to Church, Sunday. And will make them all jealous! Walter. Did you get your job back today?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I got it back."

He neglected to tell her he was getting ten dollars a week less than formerly. If he had, she would only wither him with scorn and ask him, as she always did, why didn't he stand up for his rights? Why didn't he assert himself, instead of being a timid little mouse all his life. Why indeed?

"Pass the sugar." Her voice broke shrill, strident, across his thought.

Walter reached for the sugar bowl casually—and then paused, his arm in mid-air.

It was over by Agatha. He could have sworn it was next to his plate not ten seconds ago.

He could also have sworn that he had seen out of the corner of his eye, a dim red flash—across the table.

It was after supper. Walter was sitting in the front room, reading his paper and wishing he dared smoke a cigar.

"Walter!"

He looked up. Agatha was standing in the kitchen doorway. Her face was white.

He got up slowly, went into the kitchen. "Look, Walter."

He looked. The dishes were all washed and shining and stacked neatly into place.

"Very good dear," said Walter vaguely, searching for some new compliment. "Very fast, too—".

"You fool! I didn't do those dishes!"

"Huh?"

"No. I was standing over by the ice-box, putting food away, and wishing that I—well, I was wishing that I had a husband who was considerate enough of his wife to do the dishes for her. And I thought I saw something red."

"Red?"

"Yes. Behind me. A—a flash, sort of. I turned around, and there they were. Done!"

"Oh," said Walter weakly. Then he caught sight of the ring on Agatha's finger.

It was glowing like ruby fire.

ABOUT four o'clock the next morning, Walter Simmons was quite rudely awakened. Beside him, Agatha was screaming over and over in a shrill falsetto. Screaming, and still asleep.

Abruptly she woke, and clung trembling, to him for a good five minutes before he managed to soothe her.

"Walt," she sobbed hysterically. "Oh, Walt! I had a bad dream."

She had not called him Walt for almost ten years now.

"I dreamt," she whispered, "that this ring had a funny little red man inside, and he was laughing at me and hiding. I wanted him to break the crystal, and let me see him, but he wouldn't.

"Then, all of a sudden, he did show me

his face. Oh, it was . . . *awful.*" She sobbed shudderingly. Then she was silent.

She was gazing dreamily into the ring.

Walter Simmons moistened his lips. He said, "Agatha."

"Agatha!"

She gave a little jump, and turned on him. "What?"

"Look, Agatha. Why don't you sell the ring?"

"Sell it?"

He gulped, took a firm hand on his courage. "Yes. After all, you said you were afraid."

Agatha looked at the ring. She was smiling strangely.

"I know. But I—I've changed my mind."

Walter Simmons left for the office next morning with a sickening apprehension gnawing at his insides. His fears were not relieved by the sight of Agatha, after breakfast, sitting on the sofa, staring at the winking bit of rosy crystal on her finger.

She did not even bid him good-by.

That evening, Walter did not go home. He went instead to the library, and spent a good hour and a half browsing through the sections marked "Demonology" before he found what he wanted.

FAMILIAR—he read. A demon given to a sorcerer or witch as part of his compact with Satan. In the olden times they inhabited usually the body of a toad or black cat. Of late, however, it has been found more convenient to use for the dwelling-place of the familiar some more personal object—such as a bracelet, a necklace, or ring—

"Ah," said Walter very softly. He read on.

. . . And if the owner of the familiar die, or his compact with Satan run out, then the imp should be buried with him. In the event another human come into possession of the familiar, it owes him temporary allegiance—though it can, perforce, commit whatever mischievous pranks it will.—Should the name of God be mentioned in the familiar's presence—

Walter Simmons gulped as he read the next few lines. He jumped up and went out of the library hurriedly, his short fat legs, pumping, eyes wide.

He knew now who the impeccably-dressed stranger had been.

He knew about the ring.

And—he had a very good idea what would happen should Agatha wear that ring to church tomorrow.

WHEN he arrived home, Agatha was huddled over on the sofa, staring into the ring. She looked up as he came in, gave him a dreamy smile. "Oh, are you home already?"

Walter blinked.

"Look, Walt! Look at my coat."

He glanced briefly at the new fur wrap, and nodded. "Yes, dear. Very nice."

"Just wait 'till they see me tomorrow with it at church. And with this ring." She smiled in anticipation.

Walter blinked again. There was something odd about his wife's behavior.

"Agatha," he whispered numbly. "You've got to listen. That ring. You mustn't wear it tomorrow to church."

Agatha looked at him. "Why not?"

"Because. It's—evil. Look, dear. Do me a favor, will you?"

She nodded, absently.

"Make a wish. Wish that, oh, that supper would be ready. Right now."

Agatha's lips moved. For an instant the crystal on her finger sparkled with unearthly brilliance, and Walter thought he saw something red streaking toward the kitchen—and then back again.

"Now," he managed. "Come into the kitchen."

Walter had half-expected to see what he did, but the sight was still rather frightening.

The roast was done. The table was all set. The potatoes had been mashed and the salad was made. Everything ready to go on the table.

"There," he said weakly. "See that?"

Agatha was smiling. "Of course. It's the ring. . . ."

Walter fought down the black wave of panic that closed on his insides. "Then you'll get rid of it? Sell it, or—"

"Of course not. I rather like this ring now. Sort of . . . fascinating." She kept staring at it.

Walter argued and pleaded all through supper, but to no avail. Agatha liked the ring. She would wear it tomorrow morning to church and nothing Walter could say or do would change her mind.

That was that.

AT CHURCH services next morning, all their neighborhood acquaintances were properly awed by Agatha's new coat. They *oh'd* and *ah'd*, as Agatha smirked, and displayed it to her heart's content.

A dull, fatalistic feeling had fallen upon Walter. He did not even respond to his wife's most barbed insults, paid no heed to her hisses of "Walter! Sit up straight. Everybody's looking at us!"

But as the services slowly dragged through the next hour, Agatha stopped prodding him. She was staring into the crystal on her finger, as if hypnotized. Walter closed his eyes very tightly as he remembered what he had read. . . .

Somehow he couldn't stop trembling.

At the conclusion of the hymns, the pastor turned to the congregation and lifted his hands for the blessing.

This was it. Walter held his breath. The minister's voice thundered out.

"In God's name, may peace reign!"

As the pastor uttered the words, Walter felt Agatha stiffen beside him.

Then she screamed. Horribly.

Everywhere there was commotion, the babble of excited voices, people craning and demanding to know what had happened, ushers exclaiming and hurrying forward.

Very slowly, Walter Simmons turned. He looked at Agatha's face.

Her eyes were wide and staring, and at the expression in them, he felt the short hairs bristle at the nape of his neck.

He looked at the ring.

He was not surprised to see the dim red glow gone, instead the crystal was white and lusterless, as if—whatever dwelt in it, had fled forever.

Walter wondered briefly, how the familiar had looked to Agatha, as it came out of the ring.

There were no complications. Heart failure, the coroner said.

At the funeral, many were the strange remarks at Walter Simmons' strange apathy.

"Don't look a bit sad," one of his friends whispered. "Well, that's not surprising either, if you knew how Agatha treated him. A regular shrew, she was."

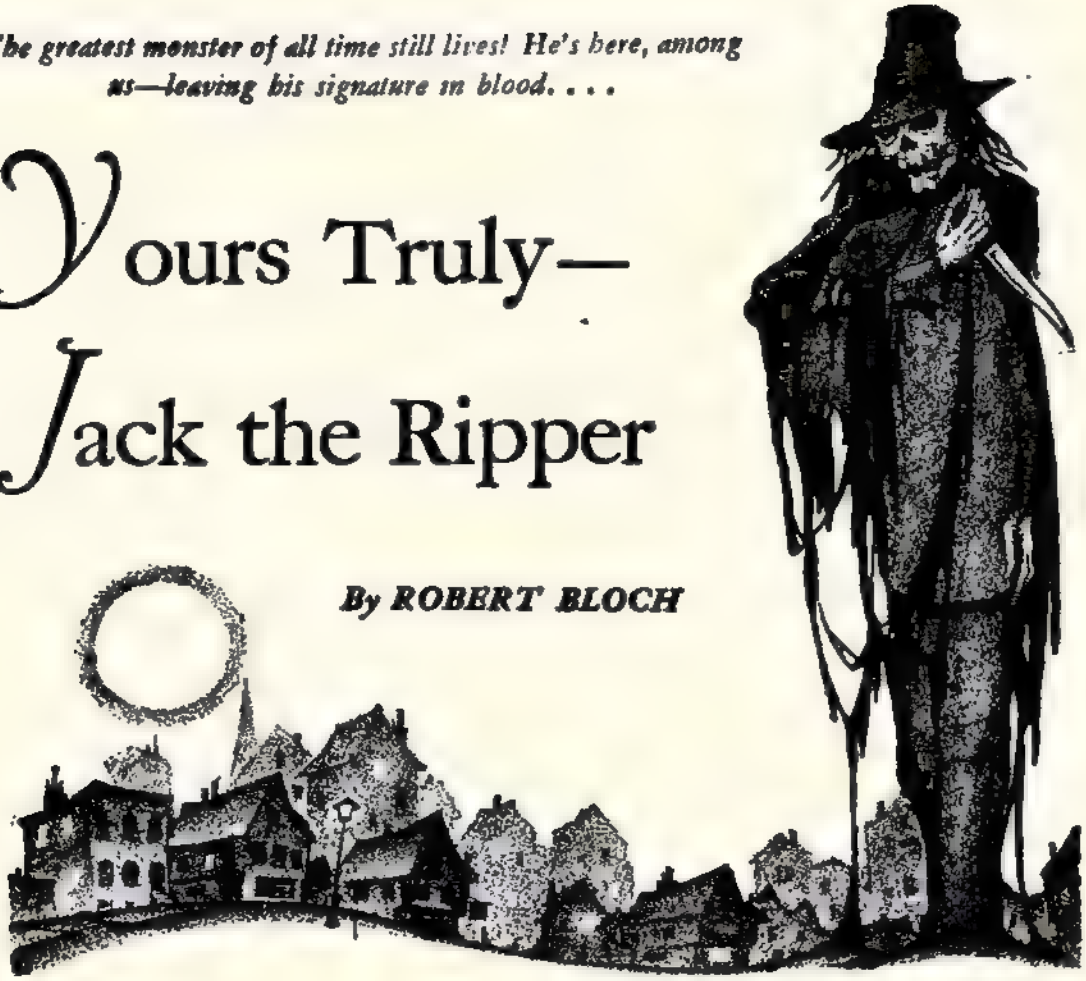
The good neighbors of Walter Simmons might have been a great deal more concerned than they were, had they seen him the next night—seen him in the cemetery, digging furtively in a grave which could not have been over a week or two old. A grave with the name "Jonathan Miles" inscribed on the headstone.

They might have said much and wondered more, could they have seen the small crystal ring Walter left in the grave.

The ring which he was returning to its former owner.

The greatest monster of all time still lives! He's here, among us—leaving his signature in blood. . . .

Yours Truly—Jack the Ripper



By ROBERT BLOCH

I LOOKED at the stage Englishman. He looked at me.

"Sir Guy Hollis?" I asked.

"Indeed. Have I the pleasure of addressing John Carmody, the psychiatrist?"

I nodded. My eyes swept over the figure of my distinguished visitor. Tall, lean, sandy-haired—with the traditional tufted mustache. And the tweeds. I suspected a monocle concealed in a vest pocket, and wondered if he'd left his umbrella in the outer office.

But more than that, I wondered what the devil had impelled Sir Guy Hollis of the British Embassy to seek out a total stranger here in Chicago.

Sir Guy didn't help matters any as he sat down. He cleared his throat, glanced around nervously, tapped his pipe against the side of the desk. Then he opened his mouth.

"What do you think of London?" he said.

"Why—"

"I'd like to discuss London with you, Mr. Carmody."

I meet all kinds. So I merely smiled, sat back, and gave him his head.

"Have you ever noticed anything strange about that city?" he asked.

"Well, the fog is famous."

"Yes, the fog. That's important. It usually provides the perfect setting."

"Setting for what?"

Sir Guy Hollis gave me an enigmatic grin.

"Murder," he murmured.

"Murder?"

"Yes. Hasn't it struck you that London, of all cities, has a peculiar affinity for those who contemplate homicide?"

They don't talk that way, except in books. Still, it was an interesting thought. London as an ideal spot for a murder!

"As you mentioned," said Sir Guy, "there is a natural reason for this. The fog is an ideal background. And then too the British have a peculiar attitude in such matters. You might call it their sporting instinct. They regard murder as a sort of a game."

I sat up straight. Here was a theory.

"Yes, I needn't bore you with homicide statistics. The record is there. Aesthetically, temperamentally, the Englishman is interested in crimes of violence.

"A man commits murder. Then the excitement begins. The game starts. Will the criminal outwit the police? You can read between the lines in their newspaper stories. Everybody is waiting to see who will score.

"British law regards a prisoner as guilty until proven innocent. That's *their* advantage. But first they must catch their prisoner. And London bobbies are not allowed to carry firearms. That's a point for the fugitive. You see? All part of the rules of the game."

I wondered what Sir Guy was driving at. Either a point or a strait-jacket. But I kept my mouth shut and let him continue.

"The logical result of this British attitude toward murder is—Sherlock Holmes," he said.

"Have you ever noticed how popular the theme of murder is in British fiction and drama?"

I smiled. I was back on familiar ground.

"*Angel Street*," I suggested.

"*Ladies in Retirement*," he countered. "*Night Must Fall*."

"*Payment Deferred*," I added. "*Laburnum Grove*, *Kind Lady*. *Love from a Stranger*. *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*. *Black Limelight*."

He nodded. "Think of the motion pictures of Alfred Hitchcock and Emlyn Williams. The actors—Wilfred Lawson and Leslie Banks."

"Charles Laughton," I continued for him. "Edmund Gwenn. Basil Rathbone. Raymond Massey. Sir Cedric Hardwicke."

"You're quite an expert on this sort of thing yourself," he told me.

"Not at all," I smiled. "I'm a psychiatrist."

THEN I leaned forward. I didn't change my tone of voice. "All I want to know," I said sweetly, "is why the hell you come up to my office and discuss murder melodramas with me."

It stung him. He sat back and blinked a little.

"That isn't my intention," he murmured. "No. Not at all. I was just advancing a theory—"

"Stalling," I said. "Stalling. Come on, Sir Guy—spit it out."

Talking like a gangster is all a part of the applied psychiatric technique. At least, it worked for me.

It worked this time.

Sir Guy stopped bleating. His eyes narrowed. When he leaned forward again he meant business.

"Mr. Carmody," he said, "have you ever heard of—Jack the Ripper?"

"The murderer?" I asked.

"Exactly. The greatest monster of them all. Worse than Springheel Jack or Crippen. Jack the Ripper. Red Jack."

"I've heard of him," I said.

"Do you know his history?"

I got tough again. "Listen, Sir Guy," I muttered. "I don't think we'll get any

place swapping old wives' tales about famous crimes of history."

Another bulls-eye. He took a deep breath.

"This is no old wives' tale. It's a matter of life or death."

He was so wrapped up in his obsession he even talked that way. Well—I was willing to listen. We psychiatrists get paid for listening.

"Go ahead," I told him. "Let's have the story."

Sir Guy lit a cigarette and began to talk.

"London, 1888," he began. "Late summer and early fall. That was the time. Out of nowhere came the shadowy figure of Jack the Ripper—a stalking shadow with a knife, prowling through London's East End. Haunting the squalid dives of Whitechapel, Spitalfields. Where he came from no one knew. But he brought death. Death in a knife.

"Six times that knife descended to slash the throats and bodies of London's women. Drabs and alley sluts. August 7th was the date of the first butchery. They found her body lying there with 39 stab wounds. A ghastly murder. On August 31st, another victim. The press became interested. The slum inhabitants were more deeply interested still.

"Who was this unknown killer who prowled in their midst and struck at will in the deserted alley-ways of night-town? And what was more important — when would he strike again?

"September 8th was the date. Scotland Yard assigned special deputies. Rumors ran rampant. The atrocious nature of the slayings was the subject for shocking speculation.

"The killer used a knife—expertly. He cut throats and removed—certain portions —of the bodies after death. He chose victims and settings with a fiendish deliberation. No one saw him or heard him. But watchmen making their gray rounds in the dawn would stumble across the hacked and horrid thing that was the Ripper's handiwork.

"Who was he? What was he? A mad surgeon? A butcher? An insane scientist? A pathological degenerate escaped from an asylum? A deranged nobleman? A member of the London police?

"Then the poem appeared in the newspapers. The anonymous poem, designed to put a stop to speculations—but which only aroused public interest to a further frenzy. A mocking little stanza:

I'm not a butcher, I'm not a kid
Nor yet a foreign skipper,
But I'm your own true loving friend,
Yours truly—Jack the Ripper.

"And on September 30th, two more throats were slashed open."

I interrupted Sir Guy for a moment.

"Very interesting," I commented. I'm afraid a faint hint of sarcasm crept into my voice.

HE WINCED, but didn't falter in his narrative.

"There was silence, then, in London for a time. Silence, and a nameless fear. When would Red Jack strike again? They waited through October. Every figment of fog concealed his phantom presence. Concealed it well—for nothing was learned of the Ripper's identity, or his purpose. The drabs of London shivered in the raw wind of early November. Shivered, and were thankful for the coming of each mornings' sun.

"November 9th. They found her in her room. She lay there very quietly, limbs neatly arranged. And beside her, with equal neatness, were laid her head and heart. The Ripper had outdone himself in execution.

"Then, panic. But needless panic. For though press, police, and populace alike

waited in sick dread, Jack the Ripper did not strike again.

"Months passed. A year. The immediate interest died, but not the memory. They said Jack had skipped to America. That he had committed suicide. They said—and they wrote. They've written ever since. Theories, hypotheses, arguments, treatises. But to this day no one knows who Jack the Ripper was. Or why he killed. Or why he stopped killing."

Sir Guy was silent. Obviously he expected some comment from me.

"You tell the story well," I remarked. "Though with a slight emotional bias."

"I've got all the documents," said Sir Guy Hollis. "I've made a collection of existing data and studied it."

I STOOD up. "Well," I yawned, in mock fatigue, "I've enjoyed your little bedtime story a great deal, Sir Guy. It was kind of you to abandon your duties at the British Embassy to drop in on a poor psychiatrist and regale him with your anecdotes."

Goading him always did the trick.

"I suppose you want to know why I'm interested?" he snapped.

"Yes. That's exactly what I'd like to know. Why are you interested?"

"Because," said Sir Guy Hollis, "I am on the trail of Jack the Ripper now. I think he's here—in Chicago!"

I sat down again. This time I did the blinking act.

"Say that again," I stuttered.

"Jack the Ripper is alive, in Chicago, "and I'm out to find him."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Wait—a—minute!"

He wasn't smiling. It wasn't a joke.

"See here," I said. "What was the date of these murders?"

"August to November, 1888."

"1888? But if Jack the Ripper was an able-bodied man in 1888, he'd surely be dead today! Why look, man—if he were merely *born* in that year, he'd be 55 years old today!"

"Would he?" smiled Sir Guy Hollis. "Or should I say, 'Would she?' Because Jack the Ripper may have been a woman. Or any number of things."

"Sir Guy," I said. "You came to the right person when you looked me up. You definitely need the services of a psychiatrist."

"Perhaps. Tell me, Mr. Carmody, do you think I'm crazy?"

I looked at him and shrugged. But I had to give him a truthful answer.

"Frankly—no."

"Then you might listen to the reasons I believe Jack the Ripper is alive today."

"I might."

"I've studied these cases for thirty years. Been over the actual ground. Talked to officials. Talked to friends and acquaintances of the poor drabs who were killed. Visited with men and women in the neighborhood. Collected an entire library of material touching on Jack the Ripper. Studied all the wild theories or crazy notions.

"I learned a little. Not much, but a little. I won't bore you with my conclusions. But there was another branch of inquiry that yielded more fruitful returns. I have studied unsolved crimes. Murders.

"I could show you clippings from the papers of half the world's great cities. San Francisco. Shanghai. Calcutta. Omsk. Paris. Berlin. Pretoria. Cairo. Milan. Adelaide.

"The trail is there, the pattern. Unsolved crimes. Slashed throats of women. With the peculiar disfigurations and removals. Yes, I've followed a trail of blood. From New York westward across the continent. Then to the Pacific. From there to Africa. During the World War of 1914-18 it was Europe. After that, South America. And since 1930, the United States again. Eighty-seven such murders—and to

the trained criminologist, all bear the stigma of the Ripper's handiwork.

"Recently there were the so-called Cleveland torso slayings. Remember? A shocking series. And finally, two recent deaths in Chicago. Within the past six months. One out on South Dearborn. The other somewhere up on Halsted. Same type of crime, same technique. I tell you, there are unmistakable indications in all these affairs—indications of the work of Jack the Ripper!"

I smiled.

"A very tight theory," I said. "I'll not question your evidence at all, or the deductions you draw. You're the criminologist, and I'll take your word for it. Just one thing remains to be explained. A minor point, perhaps, but worth mentioning."

"And what is that?" asked Sir Guy.

"Just how could a man of, let us say, 85 years commit these crimes? For if Jack the Ripper was around 30 in 1888 and lived, he'd be 85 today."

SIR GUY HOLLIS was silent. I had him there. But—

"Suppose he didn't get any older?" whispered Sir Guy.

"What's that?"

"Suppose Jack the Ripper didn't grow old? Suppose he is still a young man today?"

"All right," I said. "I'll suppose for a moment. Then I'll stop supposing and call for my nurse to restrain you."

"I'm serious," said Sir Guy.

"They all are," I told him. "That's the pity of it all, isn't it? They *know* they hear voices and see demons. But we lock them up just the same."

It was cruel, but it got results. He rose and faced me.

"It's a crazy theory, I grant you," he said. "All the theories about the Ripper are crazy. The idea that he was a doctor. Or a maniac. Or a woman. The reasons advanced for such beliefs are flimsy enough. There's nothing to go by. So why should my notion be any worse?"

"Because people grow older," I reasoned with him. "Doctors, maniacs, and women alike."

"What about—*sorcerers?*"

"Sorcerers?"

"Necromancers. Wizards. Practicers of Black Magic?"

"What's the point?"

"I studied," said Sir Guy. "I studied everything. After awhile I began to study the dates of the murders. The pattern those dates formed. The rhythm. The solar, lunar, stellar rhythm. The sidereal aspect. The astrological significance."

He *was* crazy. But I still listened.

"Suppose Jack the Ripper didn't murder for murder's sake alone? Suppose he wanted to make—a sacrifice?"

"What kind of a sacrifice?"

Sir Guy shrugged. "It is said that if you offer blood to the dark gods that they grant boons. Yes, if a blood offering is made at the proper time—when the moon and the stars are right—and with the proper ceremonies—they grant boons. Boons of youth. Eternal youth."

"But that's nonsense!"

"No. That's—Jack the Ripper."

I stood up. "A most interesting theory," I told him. "But Sir Guy—there's just one thing I'm interested in. Why do you come here and tell it to me? I'm not an authority on witchcraft. I'm not a police official or criminologist. I'm a practicing psychiatrist. What's the connection?"

Sir Guy smiled.

"You are interested, then?"

"Well, yes. There must be some point."

"There is. But I wished to be assured of your interest first. Now I can tell you my plan."

"And just what is that plan?"

Sir Guy gave me a long look. Then he spoke.

"John Carmody," he said, "you and I are going to capture Jack the Ripper."

II

THAT'S the way it happened. I've given the gist of that first interview in all its intricate and somewhat boring detail, because I think it's important. It helps to throw some light on Sir Guy's character and attitude. And in view of what happened after that—

But I'm coming to those matters.

Sir Guy's thought was simple. It wasn't even a thought. Just a hunch.

"You know the people here," he told me. "I've inquired. That's why I came to you as the ideal man for my purpose. You number amongst your acquaintances many writers, painters, poets. The so-called intelligentsia. The Bohemians. The lunatic fringe from the near north side.

"For certain reasons—never mind what they are—my clues lead me to infer that Jack the Ripper is a member of that element. He chooses to pose as an eccentric. I've a feeling that with you to take me around and introduce me to your set, I might hit upon the right person."

"It's all right with me," I said. "But just how are you going to look for him? As you say, he might be anybody, anywhere. And you have no idea what he looks like. He might be young or old. Jack the Ripper—a Jack of all trades? Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer—how will you know?"

"We shall see." Sir Guy sighed heavily. "But I must find him. At once."

"Why the hurry?"

Sir Guy sighed again. "Because in two days he will kill again."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as the stars. I've plotted his chart, you see. All 87 of the murders correspond to certain astrological rhythm patterns. If, as I suspect, he makes a blood sacrifice to renew his youth, he must murder within two days. Notice the pattern of his first crimes in London. August 7th. Then August 31. September 8th. September 30th. November 9th. Intervals of 24 days, 9 days, 22 days—he killed two this time—and then 40 days. Of course there were crimes in between. There had to be. But they weren't discovered and pinned on him.

"At any rate, I've worked out a pattern for him, based on all my data. And I say that within the next two days he kills. So I must seek him out, somehow, before then."

"And I'm still asking you what you want me to do."

"Take me out," said Sir Guy. "Introduce me to your friends. Take me to parties."

"But where do I begin? As far as I know, my artistic friends, despite their eccentricities, are all normal people."

"So is the Ripper. Perfectly normal. Except on certain nights." Again that faraway look in Sir Guy's eyes. "Then he becomes an ageless pathological monster, crouching to kill, on evenings when the stars blaze down in the blazing patterns of death."

"All right," I said. "All right. I'll take you to parties, Sir Guy. I want to go myself, anyway. I need the drinks they'll serve there, after listening to your kind of talk."

We made our plans. And that evening I took him over to Lester Baston's studio.

AS WE ascended to the penthouse roof in the elevator I took the opportunity to warn Sir Guy.

"Baston's a real screwball," I cautioned him. "So are his guests. Be prepared for anything and everything."

"I am." Sir Guy Hollis was perfectly serious. He put his hand in his trousers pocket and pulled out a gun.

"What the—" I began.

"If I see him I'll be ready," Sir Guy said. He didn't smile, either.

"But you can't go running around at a party with a loaded revolver in your pocket, man!"

"Don't worry, I won't behave foolishly."

I wondered. Sir Guy Hollis was not, to my way of thinking, a normal man.

We stepped out of the elevator, went toward Baston's apartment door.

"By the way," I murmured, "just how do you wish to be introduced? Shall I tell them who you are and what you are looking for?"

"I don't care. Perhaps it would be best to be frank."

"But don't you think that the Ripper—if by some miracle he or she is present—will immediately get the wind up and take cover?"

"I think the shock of the announcement that I am hunting the Ripper would provoke some kind of a betraying gesture on his part," said Sir Guy.

"You'd make a pretty good psychiatrist yourself," I conceded. "It's a fine theory. But I warn you, you're going to be in for a lot of ribbing. This is a wild bunch."

Sir Guy smiled.

"I'm ready," he announced. "I have a little plan of my own. Don't be shocked by anything I do," he warned me.

I nodded and knocked on the door.

Baston opened it and poured out into the hall. His eyes were as red as the maraschino cherries in his Manhattan. He teetered back and forth, regarding us very gravely. He squinted at my square-cut homburg hat and Sir Guy's mustache.

"Aha," he intoned. "The Walrus and the Carpenter."

I introduced Sir Guy.

"Welcome," said Baston, gesturing us inside with over-elaborate courtesy. He stumbled after us into the garish parlor.

I stared at the crowd that moved restlessly through the fog of cigarette smoke.

It was the shank of the evening for this mob. Every hand held a drink. Every face held a slightly hectic flush. Over in one corner the piano was going full blast, but the imperious strains of the *March* from *The Love for Three Oranges* couldn't drown out the profanity from the crap-game in the other corner.

Prokofieff had no chance against African polo, and one set of ivories rattled louder than the other.

Sir Guy got a monocle-full right away. He saw LaVerne Gonnister, the poetess, hit Hymie Kralik in the eye. He saw Hymie sit down on the floor and cry until Dick Pool accidentally stepped on his stomach as he walked through to the dining room for a drink.

He heard Nadia Vilinoff the commercial artist tell Johnny Odcutt that she thought his tattooing was in dreadful taste, and he saw Barclay Melton crawl under the dining room table with Johnny Odcutt's wife.

His zoological observations might have continued indefinitely if Lester Baston hadn't stepped to the center of the room and called for silence by dropping a vase on the floor.

"We have distinguished visitors in our midst," bawled Lester, waving his empty glass in our direction. "None other than the Walrus and the Carpenter. The Walrus is Sir Guy Hollis, a something-or-other from the British Embassy. The Carpenter, as you all know, is our own John Carmody, the prominent dispenser of libido-liniment."

He turned and grabbed Sir Guy by the arm, dragging him to the middle of the carpet. For a moment I thought Hollis might object, but a quick wink reassured me. He was prepared for this.

"It is our custom, Sir Guy," said Baston, loudly, "to subject our new friends to a little cross-examination. Just a little formality at these very formal gatherings, you

understand. Are you prepared to answer questions?"

Sir Guy nodded and grinned.

"Very well," Baston muttered. "Friends —I give you this bundle from Britain. Your witness."

THEN the ribbing started. I meant to listen, but at that moment Lydia Dare saw me and dragged me off into the vestibule for one of those Darling-I-waited-for-your-call-all-day routines.

By the time I got rid of her and went back, the impromptu quiz session was in full swing. From the attitude of the crowd, I gathered that Sir Guy was doing all right for himself.

Then Baston himself interjected a question that upset the apple-cart.

"And what, may I ask, brings you to our midst tonight? What is your mission, oh Walrus?"

"I'm looking for Jack the Ripper."

Nobody laughed.

Perhaps it struck them all the way it did me. I glanced at my neighbors and began to *wonder*.

LaVerne Gonnister. Hymie Kralik. Harmless. Dick Pool. Nadia Vilinoff. Johnny Odcutt and his wife. Barclay Melton. Lydia Dare. All harmless.

But what a forced smile on Dick Pool's face! And that sly, self-conscious smirk that Barclay Melton wore!

Oh, it was absurd, I grant you. But for the first time I saw these people in a new light. I wondered about their lives —their secret lives beyond the scenes of parties.

How many of them were playing a part, concealing something?

Who here could worship Hecate and grant that horrid goddess the dark boon of blood?

Even Lester Baston might be masquerading.

The mood was upon us all, for a moment. I saw questions flicker in the circle of eyes around the room.

Sir Guy stood there, and I could swear he was fully conscious of the situation he'd created, and enjoyed it.

I wondered idly just what was *really* wrong with him. Why he had this odd fixation concerning Jack the Ripper. Maybe he was hiding secrets, too. . . .

Baston, as usual, broke the mood. He burlesqued it.

"The Walrus isn't kidding, friends," he said. He slapped Sir Guy on the back and put his arm around him as he orated. "Our English cousin is really on the trail of the fabulous Jack the Ripper. You all remember Jack the Ripper, I presume? Quite a cutup in the old days, as I recall. Really had some ripping good times when he went out on a tear.

"The Walrus has some idea that the Ripper is still alive, probably prowling around Chicago with a Boy Scout knife. In fact"—Baston paused impressively and shot it out in a rasping stage-whisper—"in fact, he has reason to believe that Jack the Ripper might even be right here in our midst tonight."

There was the expected reaction of giggles and grins. Baston eyed Lydia Dare reprovingly. "You girls needn't laugh," he smirked. "Jack the Ripper might be a woman, too, you know. Sort of a Jill the Ripper."

"You mean you actually suspect one of us?" shrieked Laverne Gonnister, simpering up to Sir Guy. "But that Jack the Ripper person disappeared ages ago, didn't he? In 1888?"

"Aha!" interrupted Baston. "How do you know so much about it, young lady? Sounds suspicious! Watch her, Sir Guy—she may not be as young as she appears. These lady poets have dark pasts."

The tension was gone, the mood was shattered, and the whole thing was beginning to degenerate into a trivial party joke.

The man who had played the *March* was eyeing the piano with a *Scherzo* gleam in his eye that augured ill for Prokofieff. Lydia Dare was glancing at the kitchen, waiting to make a break for another drink.

Then Baston caught it.

"Guess what?" he yelled. "The Walrus has a gun!"

HIS embracing arm had slipped and encountered the hard outline of the gun in Sir Guy's pocket. He snatched it out before Hollis had the opportunity to protest.

I stared hard at Sir Guy, wondering if this thing had carried far enough. But he flicked a wink my way and I remembered he had told me not to be alarmed.

So I waited as Baston broached a drunken inspiration.

"Let's play fair with our friend the Walrus," he cried. "He came all the way from England to our party on this mission. If none of you is willing to confess, I suggest we give him a chance to find out—the hard way."

"What's up?" asked Johnny Odcutt.

"I'll turn out the lights for one minute. Sir Guy can stand here with his gun. If anyone in this room is the Ripper he can either run for it or take the opportunity to —well, eradicate his pursuer. Fair enough?"

It was even sillier than it sounds, but it caught the popular fancy. Sir Guy's protests went unheard in the ensuing babble. And before I could stride over and put in my two cents' worth, Lester Baston had reached the light switch.

"Don't anybody move," he announced, with fake solemnity. "For one minute we will remain in darkness—perhaps at the mercy of a killer. At the end of that time, I'll turn up the lights again and look for bodies. Choose your partners, ladies and gentlemen."

The lights went out.

Somebody giggled.

I heard footsteps in the darkness. Mutterings.

A hand brushed my face.

The watch on my wrist ticked violently. But even louder, rising above it, I heard another thumping. The beating of my heart.

Absurd. Standing in the dark with a group of tipsy fools. And yet there was real terror lurking here, rustling through the velvet blackness.

Jack the Ripper prowled in darkness like this. And Jack the Ripper had a knife. Jack the Ripper had a madman's brain and a madman's purpose.

But Jack the Ripper was dead, dead and dust these many years—by every human law.

Only there are no human laws when you feel yourself in the darkness, when the darkness hides and protects and the outer mask slips off your face and you feel something welling up within you, a brooding shapeless purpose that is brother to the blackness—

Sir Guy Hollis shrieked.

There was a grisly thud.

Baston had the lights on.

Everybody screamed.

Sir Guy Hollis lay sprawled on the floor in the center of the room. The gun was still clutched in his hand.

I glanced at the faces, marvelling at the variety of expressions human beings can assume when confronting horror.

All the faces were present in the circle. Nobody had fled. And yet Sir Guy Hollis lay there . . .

LaVerne Gonnister was wailing and hiding her face.

"All right."

Sir Guy rolled over and jumped to his feet. He was smiling.

"Just an experiment, eh? If Jack the Ripper *were* among those present, and thought I had been murdered, he would

have betrayed himself in some way when the lights went on and he saw me lying there.

"I am convinced of your individual and collective innocence. Just a gentle spoof, my friends."

Hollis stared at the goggling Baston and the rest of them crowding in behind him.

"Shall we leave, John?" he called to me. "It's getting late, I think."

Turning, he headed for the closet. I followed him. Nobody said a word.

It was a pretty dull party after that.

III

I MET Sir Guy the following evening as we agreed, on the corner of 29th and South Halsted.

After what had happened the night before, I was prepared for almost anything. But Sir Guy seemed matter-of-fact enough as he stood huddled against a grimy doorway and waited for me to appear.

"Boo!" I said, jumping out suddenly. He smiled. Only the betraying gesture of his left hand indicated that he'd instinctively reached for his gun when I startled him.

"All ready for our wild goose chase?" I asked.

"Yes." He nodded. "I'm glad that you agreed to meet me without asking questions," he told me. "It shows you trust my judgment." He took my arm and edged me along the street slowly.

"It's foggy tonight, John," said Sir Guy Hollis. "Like London."

I nodded.

"Cold, too, for November."

I nodded again and half-shivered my agreement.

"Curious," mused Sir Guy. "London fog and November. The place and the time of the Ripper murders."

I grinned through darkness. "Let me remind you, Sir Guy, that this isn't London, but Chicago. And it isn't November, 1888. It's over fifty years later."

Sir Guy returned my grin, but without mirth. "I'm not so sure, at that," he murmured. "Look about you. These tangled alleys and twisted streets. They're like the East End. Mitre Square. And surely they are as ancient as fifty years, at least."

"You're in the colored neighborhood off South Clark Street," I said, shortly. "And why you dragged me down here I still don't know."

"It's a hunch," Sir Guy admitted. "Just a hunch on my part, John. I want to wander around down here. There's the same geographical conformation in these streets as in those courts where the Ripper roamed and slew. That's where we'll find him, John. Not in the bright lights of the Bohemian neighborhood, but down here in the darkness. The darkness where he waits and crouches."

"Is that why you brought a gun?" I asked. I was unable to keep a trace of sarcastic nervousness from my voice. All of this talk, this incessant obsession with Jack the Ripper, got on my nerves more than I cared to admit.

"We may need the gun," said Sir Guy, gravely. "After all, tonight is the appointed night."

I sighed. We wandered on through the foggy, deserted streets. Here and there a dim light burned above a gin-mill doorway. Otherwise, all was darkness and shadow. Deep, gaping alley-ways loomed as we proceeded down a slanting side-street.

We crawled through that fog, alone and silent, like two tiny maggots floundering within a shroud.

When that thought hit me, I winced. The atmosphere was beginning to get *me*, too. If I didn't watch my step I'd go as loony as Sir Guy.

"Can't you see there's not a soul around these streets?" I said, tugging at his coat impatiently.

"He's bound to come," said Sir Guy. "He'll be drawn here. This is what I've been looking for. A *genius loci*. An evil spot that attracts evil. Always, when he slays, it's in the slums.

"You see, that must be one of his weaknesses. He has a fascination for squalor. Besides, the women he needs for sacrifice are more easily found in the dives and stewpots of a great city."

I smiled. "Well, let's go into one of the dives or stewpots," I suggested. "I'm cold. Need a drink. This damned fog gets into your bones. You Britishers can stand it, but I like warmth and dry heat."

WE EMERGED from our side-street and stood upon the threshold of an alley.

Through the white clouds of mist ahead, I discerned a dim blue light, a naked bulb dangling from a beer sign above an alley tavern.

"Let's take a chance," I said. "I'm beginning to shiver."

"Lead the way," said Sir Guy. I led him down the alley passage. We halted before the door of the dive.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked.

"Just looking in," I told him. "This is a tough neighborhood, Sir Guy. Never know what you're liable to run into. And I'd prefer we didn't get into the wrong company. Some of these Negro places resent white customers."

"Good idea, John."

I finished my inspection through the doorway glass. "Looks deserted," I murmured. "Let's try it."

We entered a dingy bar. A feeble light flickered above the counter and railing, but failed to penetrate the further gloom of the back booths.

A gigantic Negro lolled across the bar —a black giant with prognathous jaw and ape-like torso. He scarcely stirred as we came in, but his eyes flickered open quite suddenly and I knew he noted our presence and was judging us.

"Evening," I said.

He took his time before replying. Still sizing us up. Then, he grinned.

"Evening, gents. What's your pleasure?"

"Gin," I said. "Two gins. It's a cold night."

"That's right, gents."

He poured. I paid, and took the glasses over to one of the booths. We wasted no time in emptying them. The fiery liquor warmed.

I went over to the bar and got the bottle. Sir Guy and I poured ourselves another drink. The big Negro went back into his doze, with one wary eye half-open against any sudden activity.

The clock over the bar ticked on. The wind was rising outside, tearing the shroud of fog to ragged shreds. Sir Guy and I sat in the warm booth and drank our gin.

He began to talk, and the shadows crept up about us to listen.

He rambled a great deal. He went over everything he'd said in the office when I met him, just as though I hadn't heard it before. The poor devils with obsessions are like that.

I listened very patiently. After awhile I got up and took the bottle of gin off the bar. The Negro nodded, took the money I offered him, and went back to dozing. I poured Sir Guy another drink. And another.

BUT the liquor only made him more talkative. How he did run on! About ritual killings and prolonging life unnaturally—the whole fantastic tale came out again. And of course, he maintained his unyielding conviction that the Ripper was abroad tonight.

I suppose I was guilty of goading him.

"Very well," I said, unable to keep the impatience from my voice. "Let us say that your theory is correct—even though we

must overlook every natural law and swallow a lot of superstition to give it any credence.

"But let us say, for the sake of argument, that you are right. Jack the Ripper was a man who discovered how to prolong his own life through making human sacrifices. He did travel around the world as you believe. He is in Chicago now and he is planning to kill. In other words, let us suppose that everything you claim is gospel truth. So what?"

"What do you mean, 'so what'?" said Sir Guy, pouring himself another glass of gin.

"I mean—so what?" I answered. "If all this is true, it still doesn't prove that by sitting down in a dingy gin-mill on the South Side, Jack the Ripper is going to walk in here and let you kill him, or turn him over to the police. And come to think of it, I don't even know now just what you intend to *do* with him if you ever did find him."

SIR GUY gulped his gin. "I'd capture the bloody swine," he said. Capture him and turn him over to the government, together with all the papers and documentary evidence I've collected against him over a period of many years. I've spent a fortune investigating this affair, I tell you, a fortune! His capture will mean the solution of hundreds of unsolved crimes, of that I am convinced.

"I tell you, a mad beast is loose on this world! An ageless, eternal beast, sacrificing to Hecate and the dark gods!"

In vino veritas. Or was all this babbling the result of too much gin? It didn't matter. Sir Guy Hollis had another. I sat there and wondered what to do with him. The man was rapidly working up to a climax of hysterical drunkenness.

"One other point," I said, more for the sake of conversation than in any hopes of obtaining information. "You still don't explain how it is that you hope to just blunder into the Ripper."

"He'll be around," said Sir Guy. "I'm psychic. I know."

Sir Guy wasn't psychic. He was maudlin.

The whole business was beginning to infuriate me. We'd been sitting here an hour, and during all this time I'd been forced to play nursemaid and audience to a babbling idiot. After all, he wasn't a regular patient of mine.

"That's enough," I said, putting out my hand as Sir Guy reached for the half-emptied bottle again. "You've had plenty. Now I've got a suggestion to make. Let's call a cab and get out of here. It's getting late and it doesn't look as though your elusive friend is going to put in his appearance. Tomorrow, if I were you, I'd plan to turn all those papers and documents over to the F.B.I. If you're so convinced of the truth of your wild theory, they are competent to make a very thorough investigation, and find your man."

"No." Sir Guy was drunkenly obstinate. "No cab."

"But let's get out of here anyway," I said, glancing at my watch. "It's past midnight."

He sighed, shrugged, and rose unsteadily. As he started for the door, he tugged the gun free from his pocket.

"Here, give me that!" I whispered. "You can't walk around the street brandishing that thing."

I took the gun and slipped it inside my coat. Then I got hold of his right arm and steered him out of the door. The Negro didn't look up as we departed.

WE STOOD shivering in the alleyway. The fog had increased. I couldn't see either end of the alley from where we stood. It was cold. Damp. Dark. Fog or no fog, a little wind was whispering secrets to the shadows at our backs.

The fresh air hit Sir Guy just as I expected it would. Fog and gin-fumes don't mingle very well. He lurched as I guided him slowly through the mist.

Sir Guy, despite his incapacity, still stared apprehensively at the alley, as though he expected to see a figure approaching.

Disgust got the better of me.

"Childish foolishness," I snorted. "Jack the Ripper, indeed! I call this carrying a hobby too far."

"Hobby?" He faced me. Through the fog I could see his distorted face. "You call this a hobby?"

"Well, what is it?" I grumbled. "Just why else are you so interested in tracking down this mythical killer?"

My arm held him. But his stare held me.

"In London," he whispered. "In 1888 . . . one of those nameless drabs the Ripper slew . . . was my mother."

"What?"

"Later I was recognized by my father, and legitimatized. We swore to give our lives to find the Ripper. My father was the first to search. He died in Hollywood in 1926—on the trail of the Ripper. They said he was stabbed by an unknown assailant in a brawl. But I know who that assailant was.

"So I've taken up his work, do you see, John? I've carried on. And I will carry on until I do find him and kill him with my own hands.

"He took my mother's life and the lives of hundreds to keep his own hellish being alive. Like a vampire, he battens on blood. Like a ghoul, he is nourished by death. Like a fiend, he stalks the world to kill. He is cunning, devilishly cunning. But I'll never rest until I find him, never!"

I believed him then. He wouldn't give up. He wasn't just a drunken babbler any more. He was as fanatical, as determined, as relentless as the Ripper himself.

Tomorrow he'd be sober. He'd continue the search. Perhaps he'd turn those papers over to the F.B.I. Sooner or later, with such persistence—and with his motive—he'd be successful. I'd always known he had a motive.

"Let's go," I said, steering him down the alley.

"Wait a minute," said Sir Guy. "Give me back my gun." He lurched a little. "I'd feel better with the gun on me."

He pressed me into the dark shadows of a little recess.

I tried to shrug him off, but he was insistent.

"Let me carry the gun, now, John," he mumbled.

"All right," I said.

I reached into my coat, brought my hand out.

"But that's not a gun," he protested. "That's a knife."

"I know."

I bore down on him swiftly.

"John!" he screamed.

"Never mind the 'John'," I whispered, raising the knife. "Just call me . . . Jack."

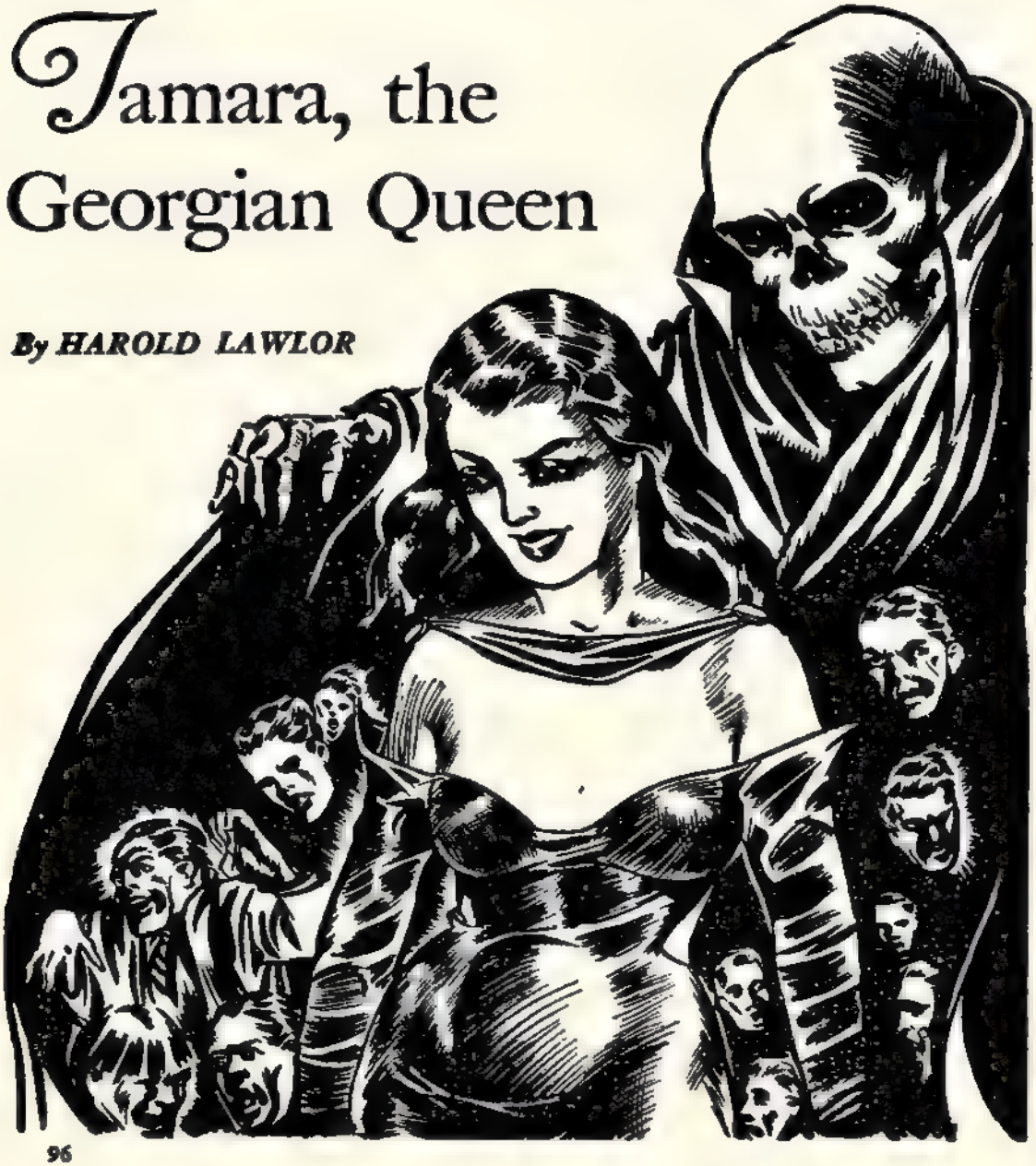
He had a beautiful wife who was really "different"—having lived once before, many centuries ago.

Tamara, the Georgian Queen

By HAROLD LAWLOR

IT'S horrible to remember now that the thing started in gaiety. Gaiety! God, and my heart aching with a pain that can't be dulled! My whole being crying yearningly for Eve!

After eight lean years of marriage—years that held days on which we'd barely had enough to eat—we were at last on top of the world. For I'd written a best-seller. It was one of those phenomena of the pub-



lishing world that make critics tear their hair out by the roots. It wasn't a good book. The critics panned it to hell and gone.

But it was full of the good old corn. The public loved it, and bought 400,000 copies the first six months it was on the stands. I had a shrewd agent. He set three film companies bidding against each other for the screen rights. When Olympic Productions finally won out, it set them back a sum running into six figures.

We went a little crazy, then, Eve and I. But who could blame us? We weren't yet thirty, we were still deeply in love, and we'd damned near starved to death!

We took a three-year lease on a Lincoln Park West penthouse, we bought a convertible, long and sleek and black, and blinding with chromium. And when Eve thought she'd like a mink coat, I laughed and quoted Valentina, "Meenk? Meenk is for foooootball!"

So Eve wore sable.

We had nearly six months of almost drunken happiness, and then—then Eve met Madame Yalta Salkov.

To this day I don't know how the meeting came about. Perhaps one of Eve's new friends said, "Eve, there's the weirdest woman—Yalta Salkov. She tells you the darnedest things about yourself. Twenty-five dollars for a fifteen minute seance, and worth every penny of it! You *must* see her, darling!"

And Eve, with an afternoon to kill and still unaccustomed money in her purse to burn, went.

I REMEMBER when she came home. I was in shorts, stretched out on a deck chair on the terrace, a sandwich in my hand, a highball at my elbow. I'd been turning over in my mind the plot of my next story, but I wasn't working very hard at it. This was the life! I stretched, and lapped up the sun.

And then Eve was there, on the edge of the chair, running her hands over my naked shoulders.

"Mmmm!" she said. "Eight years married and I still love the guy. Dull and stodgy and hopeless of me, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, and kissed her.

And then she must have remembered, for her green eyes laughed at her secret knowledge.

"You know," she said, "I always thought you'd got a bargain when you married me, but wait'll you hear!"

She was off the chair, a flash of white, striking a pose before the low parapet with its coping of Bedford stone edging our terrace.

"Careful!" I warned. "That parapet's too low for safety."

"Guess who I am!" she cried, her sleek black curls blowing in the wind.

My heart caught at the picture she made there. "You're—the girl I love."

Her eyes thanked me, but, "Try again!" she urged.

"Well, then," I said, lazily agreeable, "you're the old battle-axe I'm married to."

"*No!*" She made a face at me. She couldn't hold it back any longer. "I'm Tamara! Tamara, the Georgian Queen! Madame Salkov said so!"

"Who is Madame Salkov?" I wanted to know.

Eve told me. With her hands and her eyes and her voice she even made me see the mysterious turbaned woman, with her mask-white face, her mouth done in purple-red salve, her haunted black eyes.

"And she said I'm the reincarnation of Tamara," Eve finished. "She saw it in the cards, in the crystal, in my hand. You know, I think the woman actually believed it! She almost pushed me from the room. She looked scared to death."

Eve laughed, and came back to sit on the edge of my chair.

"So all right," I said. "You're Tamara.

We should make a liar out of Madame Yalta Salkov. But tell me, who was Tamara?"

"She was the queen of Georgia, in the Caucasus," Eve said. "According to Madame Salkov, Tamara was a beautiful, glamorous, fascinating, wicked, evil woman. Just like me! She lived in a castle high above a rocky gorge. And she had lovers. Scads of 'em. Every night a different one. And in the morning, tired of her plaything, she called her minions and had the luckless lover tossed from the battlements to be broken on the rocks below."

"Every morning?" I asked. "Every lover?"

"Every blessed morning! Every goshdarned lover! And I'm her reincarnation, mind you!" Eve finished.

I pulled her toward me. "Well, don't go getting any ideas, toots," I said, looking at the parapet. "We're forty stories up."

And we laughed. We *laughed*. God, to remember that now!

A WEEK later tragedy struck.

I'd been out that night, giving a talk on writing to a woman's "culture" club. I hadn't wanted to do it, but I couldn't get out of it. When I reached home about eleven-thirty that night, Eve was sitting on the sofa, the French doors opened behind her, reading a book. She looked up when I came in.

"Well, how did you go over?" she asked.

"They were rolling in the aisles," I admitted modestly, when the bell cut through my words. I raised my eyebrows at Eve, and hiked back to the door. It was the police. A burly Irishman, and a younger, slighter officer who seemed to be the spokeman.

"Excuse me," he said, "but there's been an accident. Have you had any visitors tonight?"

I looked at Eve, who called, "No," from the sofa. I told them I'd been out, and had only just reached home. For some reason they wanted to come in, so I stepped aside. The slighter fellow walked over to the French doors.

"These been open all evening?" he asked. looking at Eve. At her nod, he went out onto the terrace, and came back almost immediately.

Eve was watching him wide-eyed.

"My wife told you there'd been no one here tonight," I said sharply. "What's the matter?"

"A young guy leaped or fell from somewhere in this building," he said. "Landed in the alley just below your terrace there."

Eve made a little strangled sound of pity in her throat. The officer jerked his head toward the hall, and I followed both of them out.

"I'm Taylor," the younger officer said. The other's name was Doheny. Taylor went on, "No sense upsetting your wife unnecessarily, but we'd like you to come down and see if you can identify the man. You may have seen him around the building, though the manager claims the man is a stranger."

I went down with them, and through the side lobby to the alley. A squad car was parked there, and two more officers stood waiting. From somewhere they'd secured a blanket, which they pulled back now to permit me to see the dead man's face. I leaned forward, my stomach muscles taut.

The man was young, well-set-up, and darkly handsome. I'd never seen him before in my life. A search already conducted had shown there were no identifying papers or labels in his clothes.

When I'd denied any knowledge of the man, Officer Taylor said, "All right, Mr.—Wallace, is it? Thanks for coming down."

That was all. I went back to the elevator, feeling rather sickish. Eve was waiting for me upstairs. She looked pale and distraught, unlike herself.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"A young guy. Good-looking. I've never seen him around."

"Oh." Eve's lashes covered her eyes. "Dead?"

"Yes." I shivered a little. I wished I could forget the huddled, awkward way that broken body had lain. Like a rag doll, tossed carelessly aside.

I DON'T know what made me remember that ridiculous Tamara story, just then. But it flashed across my mind. And because I didn't want Eve to see how badly shaken I'd been by that scene below, I said senselessly, "Say, Eve, I hope you weren't being Tamara tonight, tossing boy friends off the terrace."

She didn't smile. I could see her whole body grow tense, and she said, low. "What a perfectly rotten, beastly thing for you to say!"

It was as if she'd slapped me. At any other time she would have known instinctively what had prompted my foolish remark. But now—I didn't know what made her take it like that. I swear it was the first sharp word she'd ever said to me. She turned quickly, but not before I'd seen the swift glint of tears in her eyes.

"Why, Eve!" I said helplessly, starting after her. "Why, honey, I didn't mean—"

But she ran blindly for the bedroom, and slammed the door. I stood there, staring dazedly at the white panels. I didn't go to her. I didn't know what to do. Such a thing had never happened between us before. I had no precedent to guide me.

And, oddly, I was afraid. The antennae of my imagination drew back instinctively from some horror they sensed, but could not define. Perplexed, I went back to the sofa and picked up the book Eve had been reading.

A half hour later, she crept from the bedroom and came to me where I was pretending to read. She sat down alongside me and laid her cheek against mine. My arm went around her.

"I'm sorry, Thorne," she whispered. "I don't know what made me lash out at you like that."

"It was all my fault." My arm tightened around her. "It was a half-witted thing for me to say."

We never spoke of it again. Once more things seemed to be between us as they were. But strangely, not quite the same.

So far as I know, the body of the dead man was never identified. We heard no more about the affair, and the police didn't come near us again. But Eve seemed quieter. No, not quite that—she was gay enough, at times. But the gaiety was forced. Or was I just imagining things?

I SAID the police never came near us again. I didn't mean it quite in that way. For two weeks later, they were back.

Again I'd gone out alone. Again Eve had spent the evening reading. And again the body of a young man had been found in the alley beneath our terrace!

When Officer Taylor came to the door and told us, I could feel my heart sink. Literally. And I know my face grew pale. I suppose Eve and I both presented the picture of guilt. The memory of that other death was as yet still fresh in our minds, and now—

The police were harder to satisfy this time. At their repeated questions, Eve only said, "There was no one here all evening. I was alone. Reading. See?" And she held up the book.

But she voiced her denials so lifelessly, with so complete a lack of conviction, that I could scarcely blame Taylor for looking skeptical. Her eyes went from Taylor to Doheny to me, and—was that dawning horror in their depths?

Luckily, my sense of the ridiculous came to my aid. I was dramatizing, letting my imagination run away with me. I was sus-

pecting Eve—*Eve!*—of who knows what sinister actions, just like any stupid hero of my earlier detective stories!

When Taylor went out onto the dark terrace, I followed him with an easier mind, after making a reassuring gesture to Eve. Taylor was leaning over the parapet gingerly. On my way to join him, I stepped on something round. Mechanically I picked it up, felt the smoothness of leather under my fingers as I thrust it into my pocket.

Taylor straightened, and his shoulders executed a baffled shrug. "Well, no dice," he said. "Would you come down again with us, Mr. Wallace?"

I nodded, and breathed more naturally. Evidently there was going to be no trouble, then.

Eve watched us go through the living room with wide eyes. If she saw the second gesture of attempted reassurance that I made, she gave no sign. Doheny stayed with her.

Again the body of the man lying in the alley, crumpled into an attitude that spelled hideously broken bones, was young, well-set-up, darkly handsome. I'd never seen him before in my life. There was no blanket this time. He was wearing brown covert slacks and a camel's-hair sport jacket. My eye vaguely noticed that one of the round leather buttons on the jacket was missing.

And then—electrified—my hand closed over the smooth round thing that my fingers had been nervously playing with in my pocket. The thing I'd picked up on our terrace. And I knew, I knew even without looking at it. The smooth leather sphere in my pocket was a button, just like the one missing from the dead man's sport jacket!

"You don't know him then?" Taylor's disappointed voice came to me like a voice in a dream.

"I—no! No, certainly not!"

I saw Taylor look at me sharply in the alley's dim light. Then apparently satisfied, he turned again and bent over the body. We were alone. Stealthily my right hand withdrew the button from my pocket. As cautiously as I could, I threw the thing far to my left.

There was a sharp *ping!*

Taylor straightened. "What was that?"

"What?"

"That noise I heard."

I saw that he wasn't really suspicious. My heart started beating again. "Oh, a rat, probably."

He nodded absently. "You needn't wait, Mr. Wallace. Would you mind telling Doheny, though, to come down here?"

I went back to the apartment. When Doheny had tramped out, I looked at Eve. She was like a ghost, huddled there in the corner of the sofa. I didn't say a word. I just went over and held her close. Her body was trembling under my hands.

"Thorne," she whispered. "Thorne, I'm afraid."

Like a child, confessing a fear of the dark.

"Ssh!" I said, stroking the soft hair.

But she shivered uncontrollably. And, again, "I'm afraid."

And, remembering the button, I knew a sick fear, too, that I couldn't down.

THIS time the police were able to identify the dead man. Perry Waite, his name was, and he was a resident of a North Shore suburb. But his parents knew of no one in our building with whom he was friendly. Nor could they give any reason why he should have committed suicide. Yet it was a suicide verdict that the coroner's jury returned.

For, luckily for Eve and me, a window was discovered open in a vacant apartment on the twenty-second floor, just above the spot where the body was found. In the absence of any other clues, the police

offered the theory that he'd jumped voluntarily from there.

The case was closed.

But for us it was only the beginning. I was terribly worried about Eve. She moved around the apartment looking like a wraith. She grew thinner and thinner, until at last I couldn't stand the look of mute dread in her eyes.

"Eve, what is it?" I asked desperately. "What's worrying you?"

"Nothing. Nothing." And her eyes slid away from my face to focus unseeingly on some spot over my shoulder. She was like she'd always been of late. Far away. I felt as if I never had her complete attention, any more. Now, when I grew insistent, and caught her by the shoulders, her head tilted back, and she said, "Thorne, hasn't it ever occurred to you that perhaps I had something to do with—with the deaths of those young men?"

That drugged look in her eyes! It scared me. And there was something else—something that I could hardly find courage to voice. "Eve, you weren't—lying, when you said you were alone those times?"

"No, no!" Her denial reassured me. But then, "I told the truth, so far as I know. *So far as I know,"* she repeated in a whisper. "But suppose, Thorne, that Madame Salkov was right, and I really *am* Tamara? Without knowing it myself . . . in some strange Jekyll-and-Hyde way?"

"That's *crazy!"* I scoffed. "You're letting this thing prey on your mind. Look, Eve. We'll get out of here. We'll take a trip somewhere, anywhere."

But she wouldn't agree to go. When I pressed her, her green eyes grew cloudy and obscure, and again her attention wandered off to some far, strange place where I could not follow. That eerie, fey quality! It got on my nerves. It persisted, until even I began to find myself wondering . . . was she Tamara?

Eve retired to her room. She seemed always to want to be alone now. Late that afternoon, I stopped my nervous pacing and fled from the house. Something had to be done. I'd get hold of Madame Yalta Salkov and force her to undo this damage she'd done.

Eve had told me where the seesess lived. A tumble-down brick rooming house, painted in scaly red, on a poverty-stricken near North Side Street.

But the slatternly rooming housekeeper whined in a Zasu Pitts voice, "Salkov? She ain't here no more. I dunno, Mister. She just went. They come and they go."

"But it's important!" I stressed. "She must have left some forwarding address."

"Not wit' me. Maybe Ella knows. *Ella!"*

But the wan slavey knew no more of Madame Salkov's present whereabouts than did her mistress.

HAVE you ever known futility? The kind that seems to be an iron hand gripping your lungs, gripping until every shallow breath you draw is torture? I wandered over to Lincoln Park, and sank onto a bench. I wasn't thinking. I was numb. Time slipped away, and darkness fell unnoticed. It was eleven o'clock before I rose, and made my way listlessly back to the penthouse.

Eve was there—and yet, not there. She took no notice of my entrance. She asked no questions as to where I'd been. I received the impression that she hadn't even known I was gone. Yet she'd changed to a clinging white dinner dress. She must, at least, have noted the passage of time.

I couldn't sit in the living room, watching her white set face, hearing the almost palpable silence around us. I got up and went to the terrace, stood at the parapet gazing far out over the trees of the park.

Presently Eve was at my side. "Thorne?"

I turned. Her face was washed in the moon's radiance. Her red lips were parted,

smiling, alluring. I caught her to me, and bent to press my mouth to hers. This wasn't the comfortable love of eight years. This was something new and strange and exciting. We pressed close.

And then the shuttered eyes before mine opened narrowly. Their greenness was a lambent flame. I was looking deep into the eyes of someone—*not Eve!*

I pushed her away, and at my startled instinctive action her eyes grew strange and smoky, and a half-smile—inexpressibly evil!—played about her lips.

I turned away and covered my face with my shaking hands, as if to press from my vision the fantasies that my sickened thoughts were conjuring.

Perhaps I heard some sound then. Perhaps it was only an atavistic sixth sense warning of danger. But a chill ran up my spine, and the hairs prickled at the nape of my neck. I half-turned.

Eve was very near me, a ghostly figure in the moonlight. And then—with the quickness of light—she leaped, her arms stiffly outthrust. Her hands jolted against my shoulder, and the parapet caught me just above the knees. I toppled, almost righted myself, then fell!

My arms flayed wildly. Air rushed into my lungs in swift horrified intake. Then my left hand struck, the fingers caught the coping. Slipped. Clung.

The jerk was like a rabbit punch on my neck. My legs swung, pendulum-fashion, over a forty-story drop. My fingers were slipping, slipping on the rough stone. My eyeballs were starting from their sockets.

And then—there were hands under my right shoulder. Lifting. Until I could raise my right hand and grab the coping. I hung there, my breath coming in tortured gasps, my heart pounding.

And always there were those tense hands clutching from above, doing their utmost to ease the full force of my weight on my agonized arms.

My breath came a little easier. I tried to throw my right leg up, and over the coping. Twice it slipped, and then the third time, my heel caught and dug desperately into the stone. Slowly, inch by inch, I eased upward. Until, with a last desperate heave, I was up and over.

My knees refused to support me. I sagged there. Sweat sprang out on my forehead, trickled from my armpits. Through a gray haze I saw Eve standing before me.

Eve!

Her hands were half-raised. She stood there, frozen, her open mouth a black hole in her twisted face.

"Thorne, I pushed you!" she whispered. "I *pushed* you!"

And then, with a little sigh, she sank into a shivering heap at my feet.

ALL through that long night I watched at her bedside. If I thought she was pale before, her pallor now approached the waxiness of death. There were deep purple shadows under her eyes, and occasionally she writhed and moaned.

I must have been in a near-coma myself. Certainly my thoughts were a jumbled chaos. I just sat there helplessly, unable to take my eyes from Eve. It wasn't until morning that I thought of calling one of the physicians who lived in the building. And before then, Eve had regained consciousness. Her stricken eyes told me she remembered clearly the events of the past night.

But when I would have touched her, stroked her hair, done something to make her feel I knew she hadn't been herself, she only twisted away from me.

"Don't!" There was utter despair in her voice. "I can't bear to have you touch me, after what I did."

She wouldn't listen. Nothing I could say would make her listen to me.

When the doctor appeared and had seen

her, he came back to the living room. "I've given your wife a mild sedative. She'll sleep most of the day. But what happened? She seems to have had a severe shock."

"I—we quarreled." I said the first thing I could think of.

"Ah, marriage!" the doctor said philosophically.

And I answered something. Anything to get rid of him. But when he'd gone I reopened the door, and caught him before he reached the elevator.

"Could you give me the name of a reputable psychiatrist?" I asked.

He looked startled, but he told me where one could be reached.

The thing had gone far enough. I'd been too long a hesitant fool. Time now I did something. Eve was sleeping when I left the apartment, and I felt she'd be safe enough. The effects of the sedative should last the greater part of the day.

But when I called Dr. Hadley, the psychiatrist, I was told that he was out of town, and wouldn't be in to his office before one o'clock that afternoon. I had a few hours to kill, so I went over to the library.

I found little about Tamara in the encyclopaedia, save that she ruled Georgia during the years 1184-1212 A.D. But a sub-reference the librarian found for me unearthed a book that was more informative. It carried substantially the same story about Tamara, or Thamar, as Madame Salkov had told Eve.

The monarch's sensuality . . . the long parade of lovers . . . their deaths in quick succession as they were hurled from the castle's walls into the depths of the rocky gorge below.

There was a footnote. My eye, reading hastily, skimmed over it. I remember only a part:

". . . until at last, the satiated monarch died by her own hand. She was found in bed, a dagger plunged into her left breast. There was no doubt it was suicide. The

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dagger was her own—with the royal crest emblazoned on its haft, a miniature of the royal crown worked in pearls for a finial."

I closed the book and returned it to its shelf.

I WAS able to make an appointment with Dr. Hadley, and when I was at last seated across from the slender psychiatrist with the poker face, I told the story as quickly as I could. Frankly, I felt like a fool in the telling, for here in these austere offices, the story sounded wildly implausible and fantastic. Evidently, however, the doctor had heard stranger, for he listened with grave attention.

"I—I suppose I've sounded like a madman," I apologized lamely, when I'd finished.

"Not at all, Mr. Wallace." The psychiatrist permitted himself a wintry smile.

I couldn't believe it. "You mean you think Eve *is* the reincarnation of Tamara?"

Dr. Hadley shook his head. "It's perfectly obvious what has happened. Madame Salkov planted a thought-suggestion in your wife's subconscious mind. Your wife is evidently a woman of a highly impressionable type. The Tamara fixation built itself up until—"

"But why should Madame Salhov tell her such a thing!" I cried.

Again the doctor smiled. "It's a fortune-teller's stock in trade to give her clients a thrill, you know. The woman, I think, never realized what mischief she was stirring up."

I wasn't quite satisfied. "Those two young men—"

The doctor spread his hands. "Coincidence. Purely coincidence, Mr. Wallace. If the truth could be known, you'd find the deaths of those young men had absolutely no connection with your wife."

"But the button! The button from Perry Waite's coat."

Dr. Hadley looked a little annoyed. "You told me you threw it away without looking at it. Could you swear the button

came from that particular coat? Of course not. You've had friends visiting you on your terrace who wear coats of that type, no doubt. You probably own a couple yourself. The button may have been there for days, weeks."

I nodded. It was true enough. And I *wanted* to believe him. There remained only the attack on me for him to explain away. And he had an explanation for that.

"That was your wife's subconscious acting," Dr. Hadley said. "The stage had been carefully set by the previous deaths of those two young men. Your wife was nervous, highly emotionalized, which induced a traumatic state, not unlike a sleep-walker's. Under its spell, she pushed you. When you felt yourself falling, you probably called out, though you do not remember doing so. But it was sufficient to awaken your wife, bring her back to *herself*. Proof that it did is your own statement that she immediately ran to catch you, help you." And Dr. Hadley smiled benignly at the obvious relief on my face.

"And you can help her? Cure her?" I was still afraid to hope.

"Yes," Dr. Hadley assured me. "We have only to plant a counter-suggestion in your wife's subconscious. It won't be difficult, as I feel the shock of her attempt on your life has already done much to set your wife on the road to recovery. Bring her in to see me tomorrow. I'd suggest, by the way, that you give up your apartment. It would be wiser if you left there immediately, and went to a hotel for the night."

Dr. Hadley stood up, terminating the interview. I know now that he was wrong. But I went out of his office—it's a tri simile, but it fits the case as no other could —like a man with a last-minute reprieve.

I could hardly wait to tell Eve. To shatter this evil spell that had held us in mounting alarm for weeks. Easy to cast off our thralldom now, I thought happily. For, like many fantastic stories, ours had a perfectly naturalistic explanation.

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I RACED home. The elevator crawled slowly upward at a maddening snail's pace. I hurried across the granite landing, opened the walnut-finished fireproof steel door of the penthouse.

"Eve!" I started to call, but the name died in my throat.

There was something wrong. I knew it the minute I opened the apartment door. The Venetian blinds were closed, and the darkened penthouse was full of a sentient silence. A frightening silence. It was a miasma, smothering, that caught me in the throat, the nostrils.

My eyes strove to pierce the half-light. And then I saw. The bedroom door was closed.

The bedroom door was closed.

Nothing so ominous about that. Nothing so terribly—I started for it. Slowly. Reluctantly. My hand outstretched before me like a sleepwalker's. The lagging steps. The terror at my heart. The long slow journey over the thick carpet. And then . . . the crystal knob of the bedroom door, cool under my hand.

I opened the door. Eve was lying on the bed, her sheer negligee in disorder.

"Eve?" Was that my voice, that hoarse whisper? "Eve?"

I came nearer. She was lying quietly. So very quietly. Nearer . . . until at last I saw that she was dead. Dead. . . .

And plunged into her left breast was a dagger—a dagger with a chased crest on its haft, and for a finial, a jeweled crown of pearls!

Harold Lawlor

WE'RE following up Harold Lawlor's first story for WEIRD TALES—*Specter in the Steel,* presented in the May number—with *Tamara, the Georgian Queen,* the author's second yarn for us and in this issue.

Mr. Lawlor, who claims to have ducked his homework for a copy of WEIRD TALES as a schoolboy—and with no appreciable ill-effects, sends along the following data on himself and his first two stories for WEIRD TALES.

I wrote my first story at the age of nine—a thriller called *The Taxicab Boys.* Unhappily this valuable "first" is no longer in existence. It'd probably bring a fortune today!

The Muse went into hiding then for quite a while—years devoted to schooling and the usual varied assortment of jobs which seems to be the common lot of all writers. (And incidentally is becoming as corny for publicity purposes as the erstwhile convent background of every actress.)

It was during the depression that I once again felt the desire to write. Escape, probably—increasing deafness made jobs hard for me to get. And then, too, writing seemed such an easy way to make some money. (Ah, Youth and its lost illusions!) I didn't learn any better until I'd written many love stories and confessions, igniting no rivers the while. When I'd been thoroughly humbled I went to work as secretary to Don Wilcox, one of

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the well-known writers of science and fantasy fiction.

He had faith, when I had little myself, in my future as a writer. It was at his suggestion that I tried a fantasy, and I sold the first one I wrote. Proof perhaps that those midnight hours spent with WEIRD TALES and Poe and Sax Rohmer, instead of homework, weren't wasted after all. There have been other sales since then, and I hope some not too distant day to be as good as the top-notchers in the field.

As to the writing of the stories *Specter in the Steel* and *Tamara, The Georgian Queen: Specter* came to me from nowhere. One of those "blue moon" stories. All of a sudden it was just *there*—plot, characters, background and all. I wrote it rapidly, put it away for a few days, and then changed only one sentence. I don't mind adding that if this sort of thing happened oftener writers would lead happier lives.

Tamara's genesis followed the more familiar jig-saw puzzle pattern. Once, long ago, I saw a brief reference to Tamara in some now-forgotten book. She stayed half-buried in my memory all these years, and obligingly nudged me when I needed a plot idea. The character of Eve came next—the unhappy harborer of Tamara's psyche. Then Thorne—and bit by bit, piece by piece, the rest of it. The writing, then. Fiddling with the opening. Writing, tearing up, throwing away . . . until at last the opening *felt* right and said what I wanted it to say. The rest of the story went along all right then. That's the way it usually is with every story. And then—

It's finished. It's in the mail. You'll never write another story as good—not if you live to be a hundred. You've shot your wad this time. You're through. You mope.

Who'd want to be a writer?

Pretty soon . . . another idea. Another story. *Better.* Maybe you're right. Maybe weeks later you learn you were wrong. But in the meantime—you're off!

Who wouldn't want to be a writer?

Harold Lawlor

Humor-to-Horror-to-Humor

ROBERT BLOCH is back in his bloodthirsty mood, you'll surely concede after reading the little matter of one, Jack the Ripper. But Mr. Bloch can't stay either consistently horrifying or consistently light. For coming up is a sequel to his *Nursemaid to Nightmares* of last November's issue. If you like your monsters with lace collars and well-salted you'll enjoy the sequel. If you don't . . . you'll like it anyway.

Don't Be Funny

FROM Phoenix, Arizona, Mr. Richard Tooker, who had a story of his own in one of the first issues of WEIRD TALES, writes:

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES over a period of many years. . . . Personally, I am not a weird story writer, which may be the reason why I like weird stories so well. Anyone who can make the supernatural sound real to me is worth reading.

But I must put in a complaint against the numbers of "humorous" weird stories appearing in WEIRD TALES. Humor does not belong in a weird story, nor extravaganza, nor the usual brand of satire. . . .

We want the real, unadulterated article in WEIRD TALES. Let the boys do their playing around in the fantasy magazines; make them give us plenty of blood and mystery and inexplicability in our weird stories on the principle that the supernatural can never be fully explained by mortals.

READERS' VOTE

His Last Appearance
The Street of Faces
The Unfriendly World
Lost
The Scythe
Return of the Undead
Legacy in Crystal
Your Truly—Jack the Ripper
Tamara, The Georgian Queen

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best. Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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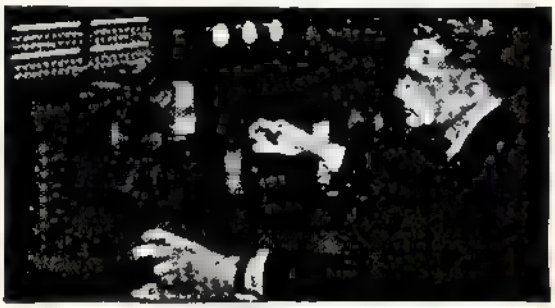

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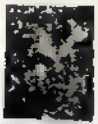

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• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

On Egyptology

Plainly speaking, this letter is written with the fervent hope that you will publish it in one of the future issues of WEIRD TALES, so that I may come into contact with other persons who are interested in Egyptology. Needless to say, all such persons who write to me may be sure of a prompt reply.

I am a writer of various sorts of fiction and non-fiction, the greater portion of which is published in Canadian and British periodicals. My work deals largely with the different aspects of excavating an ancient tomb and with relic-hunting expeditions in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes. Incidentally, at present, I am preparing a book on the science of Egyptology. The volume is due to be published in August of this year. It is partly a history of Egypt, and partly a travel-autobiography of my experiences while digging for relics in the Valley of the Kings. Before the war flared up, I spent quite some time in Egypt, wandering up and down the mountain and valley of the tombs, searching frantically for relics or better, for the entrance to a long-forgotten sepulcher. I found neither; but I collected plenty of material for my book, which, in my opinion, is one of the most complete of its kind. So come on, all interested readers, and I will tell you how it feels to stand inside a tomb three thousand years old, etc. Also, I will reserve complimentary copies of my book, "The Science of Egyptology," for the first three persons to write me.

Here, it seems, should be a good place to say a few words about WEIRD TALES, that most fascinating of all magazines dealing with the occult. Late in 1938, I ran across my first copy of W. T., and I was more than a little surprised to find a publication of that type using such a variety of plots and eerie settings and strange characters. W. T. is truly the best magazine of its kind on the stands.

V. Edward Sutherland
1501 Jefferson St., Tip Top, Virginia.

Watch the Bottle, Lawrence

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for a considerable time. Never before have I read such stories of the supernatural and the evil people of darkness.

I think eerie, phenomenal and scientific information about mysterious happenings and things is tops. Reading some of the weird, spine-chilling stories during a lonely evening is enough to work the bravest into a cold sweat.

After reading the story, "A Bottle of Gin," I even make sure what each bottle contains and what the label says before drinking.

I would like to join the Weird Tales Club very much and have a membership in the league of the fantastic and weird.

Lawrence Straw
5872 North 36th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

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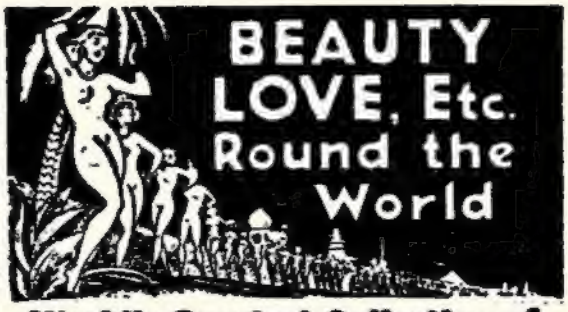
We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.



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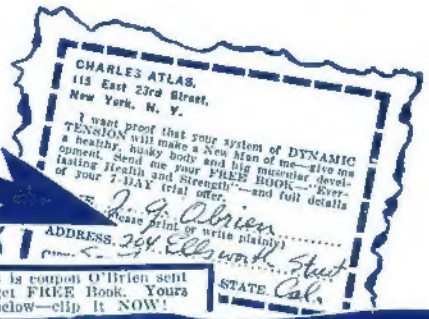

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I want proof that your system of DYNAMIC TENSION will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your FREE BOOK—"Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-DAY trial offer.

J. G. O'Brien
(Please print or write plainly)

ADDRESS 294 Ellsworth Street

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...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

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An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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"I'll prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN"— *Charles Atlas*

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I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE; I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

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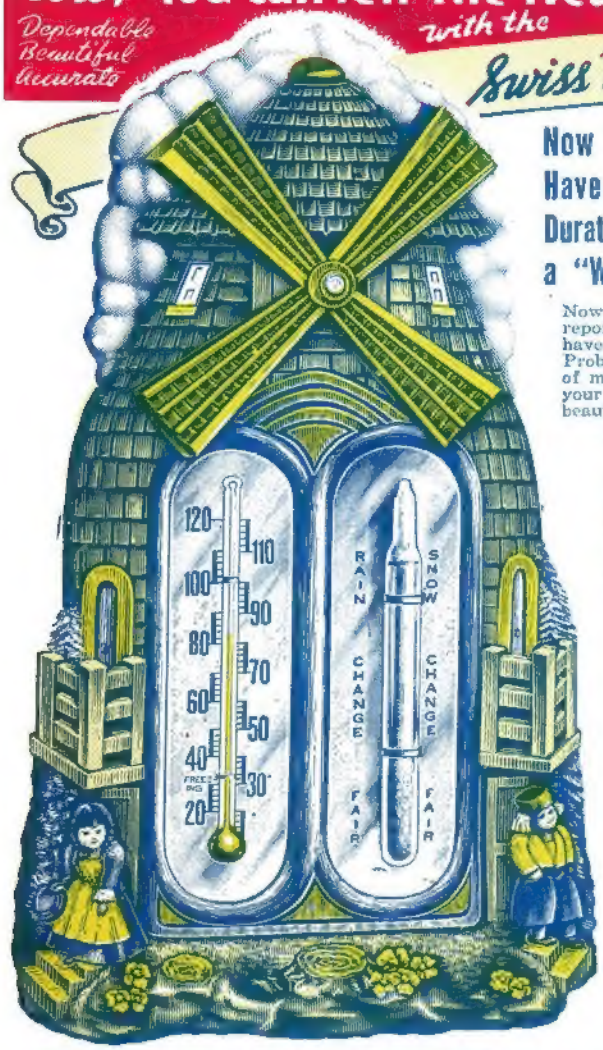

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